

ELLERY QUEEN'S 1962 ANTHOLOGY

\$1.00

Erle Stanley Gardner
Agatha Christie
Cornell Woolrich
John Dickson Carr
Ray Bradbury
Nicholas Blake
MacKinlay Kantor
Sinclair Lewis
Q. Patrick
Phyllis Bentley
Frances & Richard Lockridge
Fredric Brown
Rex Stout
Ferenc Molnár
Mary Roberts Rinehart
Craig Rice
Arthur Miller
Leslie Ford
Ellery Queen
Dorothy L. Sayers
Anthony Boucher
Hugh Pentecost

3 SHORT
NOVELS
20 SHORT
STORIES

**A Who's Who
of Whodunits**

ELLERY QUEEN'S
1962
ANTHOLOGY

Edited by
ELLERY QUEEN

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Editors' Note

Dear Reader:

The reception by readers and critics of our 1960 ANTHOLOGY was so encouraging that we offered you an encore, the 1961 ANTHOLOGY; and the response to the second annual was also so satisfying that we now present to you ELLERY QUEEN's 1962 ANTHOLOGY, thus making our annual paperback collections a full-fledged series. Like the two earlier anthologies, the third contains 3 short novels and 20 short stories, by not only some of the greatest names in the mystery field but also by some of the most celebrated figures in world literature.

The 1960 ANTHOLOGY had stories by such eminent detective writers as Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, and Rex Stout—and crime stories by W. Somerset Maugham, Ben Hecht, and John van Druten. The 1961 ANTHOLOGY again offered Christie, Stout, and Gardner, as well as Simenon, Vickers, Ellin, Coxe, and Eberhart—and tales by Budd Schulberg, Lord Dunsany, Philip Wylie, and Quentin Reynolds. Now, in this third selection, the great detective writers are again

present, joined by such Very Important Practitioners as Cornell Woolrich, Mary Roberts Rinehart, and Dorothy L. Sayers—and by such internationally famous authors as Sinclair Lewis, Arthur Miller, and Ferenc Molnár.

In a simple phrase, the best by the best . . .

The emphasis in the 1962 ANTHOLOGY is on famous detective characters. In this collection you will stand at the side of, sit on the shoulder of, indeed get into the very brain of such distinguished sleuths as (in order of their appearance in this book)

Erle Stanley Gardner's Perry Mason

Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot

John Dickson Carr's Dr. Gideon Fell

Nicholas Blake's Nigel Strangeways

Phyllis Bentley's Miss Phipps

Frances & Richard Lockridges' Captain Heimrich

Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe

Craig Rice's John J. Malone

Leslie Ford's Mr. Pinkerton

E.Q.'s Ellery Queen

plus, for "good measure . . . and running over," detectives created by MacKinlay Kantor, Anthony Boucher, and Hugh Pentecost.

So, once again, we bid you happy reading—with just as happy reading, we promise you, in years to come, the good Lord willing . . .

ELLERY QUEEN

P.S.: We almost forgot: once more, in this third collection, we adhere to two clear and definitive editorial policies: first, every story must meet the twin standards of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*—high quality or high professionalism of writing, and superior craftsmanship or superior originality of plotting; and second, not a single story in this book has ever appeared in any anthology previously edited by Ellery Queen.

Erle Stanley Gardner

The Case of the Crimson Kiss

So far as we have been able to check, there has been only one short story about Perry Mason ("The Case of the Irate Witness" in ELLERY QUEEN'S 1960 ANTHOLOGY) and only two short novels about the most famous lawyer-detective of our times, if not of all time. Here is one of those two short novels . . .

PREOCCUPIED WITH PROBLEMS OF her own happiness, Fay Allison failed to see the surge of bitter hatred in Anita's eyes. So Fay, wrapped in the mental warmth of romantic thoughts, went babbling on to her roommate, her tongue loosened by the cocktail which Anita had prepared before their make-shift dinner.

"I'd known I loved him for a long time," she said, "but honestly, Anita, it never occurred to me that Dane was the marrying kind. He'd had that one unfortunate affair, and he'd always seemed so detached and objective about everything. Of course, underneath all that reserve he's romantic and tender. . . . Anita, I'm so lucky, I can hardly believe it's true."

Anita Bonsal, having pushed her dinner dishes to one side, toyed with the stem of her empty cocktail glass. Her eyes were pinpricks of black hatred which she was afraid to let Fay Allison see. "You've fixed a date?" she asked.

"Just as soon as Aunt Louise can

get here. I want her to be with me. I—and, of course, I'll want you, too."

"When will Aunt Louise get here?"

"Tomorrow or next day, I think. I haven't heard definitely."

"You've written her?"

"Yes. She'll probably take the night plane. I mailed her my extra keys so she can come right on in whenever she gets here, even if we aren't home."

Anita Bonsal was silent, but Fay Allison wanted to talk. "You know how Dane is. He's always been sort of impersonal. He took you out at first as much as he did me, and then he began to specialize on me. Of course, you're so popular, you didn't mind. It's different with me. Anita, I was afraid to acknowledge even to myself how deeply I felt, because I thought it might lead to heartache."

"All my congratulations, dear."

"Don't you think it will work out, Anita? You don't seem terribly enthusiastic."

"Of course it will work out. It's just that I'm a selfish devil and it's going to make a lot of difference in my personal life—the apartment and all that. Come on; let's get the dishes done. I'm going out tonight and I suppose you'll be having company."

"No, Dane's not coming over. He's going through a ceremony at his bachelor's club—one of those silly things that men belong to. He has to pay a forfeit or something, and there's a lot of horseplay. I'm so excited I'm just walking on air."

"Well," Anita said, "I go away for a three-day weekend and a lot seems to happen around here. I'll have to start looking for another roommate. This apartment is too big for me to carry by myself."

"You won't have any trouble. Just pick the person you want. How about one of the girls at the office?"

Anita shook her head, tight-lipped.

"Well, of course, I'll pay until the fifteenth and then—"

"Don't worry about that," Anita said lightly. "I'm something of a lone wolf at heart. I don't get along too well with most women, but I'll find someone. It'll take a little time for me to look around. Most of the girls in the office are pretty silly."

They did the dishes and straightened up the apartment, Fay Allison talking excitedly, laughing with lighthearted merriment, Anita Bon-sal moving with the swift, silent ef-

ficiency of one who is skillful with her hands.

As soon as the dishes had been finished and put away, Anita slipped into a long, svelte, black evening dress and put on her fur coat. She smiled at Fay and said, "You'd better take some of the sleeping pills tonight, dear. You're all wound up."

Fay said, somewhat wistfully, "I am afraid I talked you to death, Anita. I wanted someone to listen while I built air castles. I—I'll read a book. I'll be waiting up when you get back."

"Don't," Anita said. "It'll be late."

Fay said wistfully, "You're always so mysterious about things, Anita. I really know very little about your friends. Don't you ever want to get married and have a home of your own?"

"Not me. I'm too fond of having my own way, and I like life as it is," Anita said, and slipped out through the door.

She walked down the corridor to the elevator, pressed the button, and when the cage came up to the sixth floor, stepped in, pressed the button for the lobby, waited until the elevator was halfway down, then pressed the *Stop* button, then the button for the seventh floor.

The elevator rattled slowly upward and came to a stop.

Anita calmly opened her purse, took out a key, walked down the long corridor, glanced swiftly back toward the elevator, then fitted the

key to Apartment 702, and opened the door.

Carver L. Clements looked up from his newspaper and removed the cigar from his mouth. He regarded Anita Bonsal with eyes that showed his approval, but he kept his voice detached as he said, "It took you long enough to get here."

"I had to throw a little wool in the eyes of my roommate, and listen to her prattle of happiness. She's marrying Dane Grover."

Carver Clements put down the newspaper. "The hell she is!"

"It seems he went overboard in a burst of romance, and his attentions became serious and honorable," Anita said bitterly. "Fay has written her Aunt, Louise Marlow, and as soon as she gets here they'll be married."

Carver Clements looked at the tall brunette. He said, "I had it figured out that you were in love with Dane Grover, yourself."

"So that's been the trouble with you lately!"

"Weren't you?"

"Heavens, no!"

"You know, my love," Clements went on, "I'd hate to lose you now."

Anger flared in her eyes. "Don't think you own me!"

"Let's call it a lease," he said.

"It's a tenancy-at-will," she flared. "And kindly get up when I come into the room. After all, you might show some manners."

Clements arose from the chair. He was a spidery man with long

arms and legs, a thick, short body, a head almost bald, but he spent a small fortune on clothes that were skillfully cut to conceal the chunkiness of his body. He smiled, and said, "My little spitfire! But I like you for it. Remember, Anita, I'm playing for keeps. As soon as I can get my divorce straightened out."

"You and your divorce!" she interrupted. "You've been pulling that line—"

"It isn't a line. There are some very intricate property problems. They can't be handled abruptly. You know that."

She said, "I know that I'm tired of all this pretense. If you're playing for keeps, make me a property settlement."

"And have my wife's lawyers drag me into court for another examination of my assets after they start tracing the checks? Don't be silly."

His eyes were somber in their steady appraisal. "I like you, Anita. I can do a lot for you. I like that fire that you have. But I want it in your heart and not in your tongue. My car's in the parking lot. You go on down and wait. I'll be down in five minutes."

She said, "Why don't you take me out as though you weren't ashamed of me?"

"And give my wife the opportunity she's looking for? Then you *would* have the fat in the fire. The property settlement will be signed within five or six weeks. After that

"I'll be free to live my own life in my own way. Until then—until then, my darling, we have to be discreet in our indiscretions."

She started to say something, checked herself, and stalked out of the apartment.

Carver Clements's automobile was a big, luxurious sedan equipped with every convenience; but it was cold sitting there, waiting.

After ten minutes, which seemed twenty, Anita grew impatient. She flung open the car door, went to the entrance of the apartment house, and angrily pressed the button of 702.

When there was no answer, she knew that Clements must be on his way down, so she walked back out. But Clements didn't appear.

Anita used her key to enter the apartment house. The elevator was on the ground floor. She made no attempt at concealment this time, but pressed the button for the seventh floor, left the elevator, strode down the corridor, stabbed her key into the metal lock of Clement's apartment, and entered the room.

Carver L. Clements, dressed for the street, was lying sprawled on the floor.

A highball glass lay on its side, two feet from his body. It had apparently fallen from his hand, spilling its contents as it rolled along the carpet. Clements's face was a peculiar hue, and there was a sharp bitter odor which seemed intensi-

fied as she bent toward his froth-flecked lips. Since Anita had last seen him, he had quite evidently had a caller. The print of half-parted lips flared in gaudy crimson from the front of his bald head.

With the expertness she had learned from a course in first-aid, Anita pressed her finger against the wrist, searching for a pulse. There was none.

Quite evidently, Carver L. Clements, wealthy playboy, yachtsman, broker, gambler for high stakes, was dead.

In a panic, Anita Bonsal looked through the apartment. There were all too many signs of her occupancy—nightgowns, lingerie, shoes, stockings, hats, even toothbrushes and her favorite tooth paste.

Anita Bonsal turned back toward the door and quietly left the apartment. She paused in the hallway, making certain there was no one in the corridor. This time she didn't take the elevator, but walked down the fire stairs, and returned to her own apartment. . . .

Fay Allison had been listening to the radio. She jumped up as Anita entered.

"Oh, Anita, I'm so glad! I thought you wouldn't be in until real late. What happened? It hasn't been a half-hour.

"I developed a beastly headache," Anita said. "My escort was a trifle intoxicated, so I slapped his face and came home. I'd like to sit up and have you tell me about your

plans, but I do have a headache, and you must get a good night's sleep tonight. You'll need to be looking your best tomorrow."

Fay laughed. "I don't want to waste time sleeping. Not when I'm so happy."

"Nevertheless," Anita said firmly, "we're going to get to bed early. Let's put on pajamas and have some hot chocolate. Then we'll sit in front of the electric heater and talk for just exactly twenty minutes."

"Oh, I'm so glad you came back!" Fay said.

"I'll fix the drink," Anita told her. "I'm going to make your chocolate sweet tonight. You can start worrying about your figure tomorrow."

She went to the kitchen, opened her purse, took out a bottle of barbiturate tablets, emptied a good half of the pills into a cup, carefully ground them up into powder, and added hot water until they were dissolved.

When she returned to the living-room, carrying the two steaming cups of chocolate frothy with melted marshmallows floating on top, Fay Allison was in her pajamas.

Anita Bonsal raised her cup. "Here's to happiness, darling."

After they had finished the first cup of chocolate, Anita talked Fay into another cup, then let Fay discuss her plans until drowsiness made the words thick, the sentences detached.

"Anita, I'm so sleepy all of a sud-

den. I guess it's the reaction from having been so keyed up. I . . . darling, it's all right if I . . . You don't care if I . . ."

"Not at all, dear," Anita said, and helped Fay into bed, tucking her in carefully. Then she gave the situation careful consideration.

The fact that Carver Clements maintained a secret apartment in that building was known only to a few of Clements's cronies. These people knew of Carver Clements's domestic difficulties and knew why he maintained this apartment. Fortunately, however, they had never seen Anita. That was a big thing in her favor. Anita was quite certain Clements's death hadn't been due to a heart attack. It had been some quick-acting, deadly poison. The police would search for the murderer.

It wouldn't do for Anita merely to remove her things from that apartment, and, besides, that wouldn't be artistic enough. Anita had been in love with Dane Grover. If it hadn't been for that dismal entanglement with Carver Clements . . . However, that was all past now, and Fay Allison, with her big blue eyes, her sweet, trusting disposition, had turned Dane Grover from a disillusioned cynic into an ardent suitor.

Well, it was a world where the smart ones got by. Anita had washed the dishes. Fay Allison had dried them. Her fingerprints would be on glasses and on dishes. The

management of the apartment house very considerably furnished dishes identical in pattern, so it needed only a little careful work on her part. The police would find Fay's Allison's nightgowns in Carver Clements's secret apartment. They would find glasses that had Fay's fingerprints on them. And when they went to question Fay Allison, they would find she had taken an overdose of sleeping pills.

Anita would furnish the testimony that would make it all check into a composite, sordid pattern. A girl who had been the mistress of a rich playboy, then had met a younger and more attractive man who had offered her marriage. She had gone to Carver Clements and wanted to check out, but with Carver Clements one didn't simply check out. So Fay had slipped the fatal poison into his drink, and then had realized she was trapped when Anita returned home unexpectedly and there had been no chance for Fay to make a surreptitious removal of her wearing apparel from the upstairs apartment. Anita would let the police do the figuring. Anita would be horrified, simply stunned, but, of course, cooperative.

Anita Bonsal deliberately waited three hours until things began to quiet down in the apartment house, then she took a suitcase and quietly went to work, moving with the smooth efficiency of a woman who could think out details.

When she had finished, she carefully polished the key to Apartment 702 so as to remove any possible fingerprints, and dropped it in Fay Allison's purse. She ground up all but six of the remaining sleeping tablets and mixed the powder with the chocolate which was left in the cannister.

After Anita put on pajamas she took the remaining six tablets, washed off the label with hot water, and tossed the empty bottle out of the back window of the apartment. Then she snuggled down into her own twin bed and switched off the lights.

The maid was due to come at eight the next morning to clean up the apartment. She would find two still figures, one dead, one drugged.

Two of the tablets constituted the heaviest prescribed dose. The six tablets Anita had taken began to worry her. Perhaps she had really taken too many. She wondered if she could call a drug store and find out if—A moment later she was asleep. . . .

Louise Marlow, tired from the long airplane ride, paid off the taxicab in front of the apartment house.

The cab driver helped her with her bags to the entrance door. Louise Marlow inserted the key which Fay Allison had sent her, smiled her thanks to the driver, and picked up her bags.

Sixty-five years old, white-headed, steely-eyed, square of shoulder

and broad of beam, she had a salty philosophy of her own. Her love was big enough to encompass those who were dear to her with a protecting umbrella. Her hatred was bitter enough to goad her enemies into confused retreat.

With casual disregard for the fact that it was now one o'clock in the morning, she marched down the corridor to the elevator, banged her bags into the cage, and punched the button for the sixth floor.

The elevator moved slowly upward, then shuddered to a stop. The door slid slowly open and Aunt Louise, picking up her bags, walked down the corridor.

At length she found the apartment she wanted, inserted her key, opened the door, and groped for a light switch. She clicked it on, and called "It's me, Fay!"

There was no answer.

Aunt Louise dragged her bags in, pushed the door shut, called out cheerfully, "Don't shoot," and then added by way of explanation, "I picked up a cancellation on a earlier plane, Fay."

The continued silence bothered her. She moved over to the bedroom.

"Wake up, Fay. It's your Aunt Louise!"

She turned on the bedroom light, smiled down at the two sleepers, said, "Well, if you're going to sleep right through everything, I'll make up a bed on the davenport and say hello to you in the morning."

Then something in the color of Fay Allison's face caused the keen eyes to become hard with concentration.

Aunt Louise went over and shook Fay Allison, then turned to Anita Bonsal and started shaking her.

The motion finally brought Anita back to semiconsciousness from drugged slumber. "Who is it?" she asked thickly.

"I'm Fay Allison's Aunt Louise. I got here ahead of time. What's happened?"

Anita Bonsal knew in a drowsy manner that this was a complicating circumstance that she had not foreseen, and despite the numbing effect of the drug on her senses, managed to make the excuse which was to be her first waking alibi.

"Something happened," she said thickly. "The chocolate . . . We drank chocolate and it felt like . . . I can't remember . . . can't remember . . . I want to go to sleep."

She let her head swing over on a limp neck and became a dead weight in Louise Marlow's arms.

Aunt Louise put her back on the bed, snatched up a telephone directory, and thumbed through the pages until she found the name *Perry Mason, Attorney*.

There was a night number: Westfield 6-5943.

Louise Marlow dialed the number.

The night operator on duty at the switchboard of the Drake De-

detective Agency, picked up the receiver and said, "Night number of Mr. Perry Mason. Who is this talking, please?"

"This is Louise Marlow talking. I haven't met Perry Mason but I know his secretary, Della Street. I want you to get in touch with her and tell her that I'm at Keystone 9-7600. I'm in a mess and I want her to call me back here just as quick as she can. . . . Yes, that's right! You tell her it's Louise Marlow talking and she'll get busy. I think I may need Mr. Mason before I get done; but I want to talk with Della right now."

Louise Marlow hung up and waited.

Within less than a minute she heard the phone ring, and Della Street's voice came over the line as Aunt Louise picked up the receiver.

"Why, Louise Marlow, whatever are you doing in town?"

"I came in to attend the wedding of my niece, Fay Allison," Aunt Louise said. "Now, listen, Della. I'm at Fay's apartment. She's been drugged and I can't wake her up. Her roommate, Anita Bonsal, has also been drugged. Someone's tried to poison them!

"I want to get a doctor who's good, and who can keep his mouth shut. Fay's getting married tomorrow. Someone's tried to kill her, and I propose to find out what's behind it. If anything should get into the newspapers about this, I'll

wring someone's neck. I'm at the Mandrake Arms, Apartment 604. Rush a doctor up here, and then you'd better get hold of Perry Mason and—"

Della Street said, "I'll send a good doctor up right away, Mrs. Marlow. You sit tight. I'm getting busy."

When Aunt Louise answered the buzzer, Della Street said, "Mrs. Marlow, this is Perry Mason. This is 'Aunt Louise,' Chief. She's an old friend from my home town."

Louise Marlow gave the famous lawyer her hand and a smile. She kissed Della, said, "You haven't changed a bit, Della. Come on in."

"What does the doctor say?" Mason asked.

"He's working like a house afire. Anita is conscious. Fay is going to pull through, all right. Another hour and it would have been too late."

"What happened?" Mason asked.

"Someone dumped sleeping medicine in the powdered chocolate, or else in the sugar."

"Any suspicions?" Mason asked.

She said, "Fay was marrying Dane Grover. I gather from her letters he's a wealthy but shy young man who had one bad experience with a girl years ago and had turned bitter and disillusioned, or thought he had."

"I got here around one o'clock, I guess. Fay had sent me the keys. As soon as I switched on the light and looked at Fay's face I knew

that something was wrong. I tried to wake her up and couldn't. I finally shook some sense into Anita. She said the chocolate did it. Then I called Della. That's all I know about it."

"The cups they drank the chocolate from?" Mason asked. "Where are they?"

"On the kitchen sink—unwashed."

"We may need them for evidence," Mason said.

"Evidence, my eye!" Louise Marlow snorted. "I don't want the police in on this. You can imagine what'll happen if some sob sister spills a lot of printer's ink about a bride-to-be trying to kill herself."

"Let's take a look around," Mason said.

The lawyer moved about the apartment. He paused as he came to street coats thrown over the back of a chair, then again as he looked at the two purses.

"Which one is Fay Allison's?"

"Heavens, I don't know. We'll have to find out," Aunt Louise said.

Mason said, "I'll let you two take the lead. Go through them carefully. See if you can find anything that would indicate whether anyone might have been in the apartment shortly before they started drinking the chocolate. Perhaps there's a letter that will give us a clue, or a note."

The doctor, emerging from the bedroom, said, "I want to boil some water for a hypo."

"How are they coming?" Mason asked, as Mrs. Marlow went to the kitchen.

"The brunette is all right," the doctor said, "and I think the blonde will be soon."

"When can I question them?"

The doctor shook his head. "I wouldn't advise it. They are groggy, and there's some evidence that the brunette is rambling and contradictory in her statements. Give her another hour and you can get some facts."

The doctor, after boiling water for his hypo, went back to the bedroom.

Della Street moved over to Mason's side and said in a low voice, "Here's something I don't understand, Chief. Notice the keys to the apartment house are stamped with the numbers of the apartments. Both girls have keys to this apartment in their purses. Fay Allison also has a key stamped 702. What would she be doing with the key to another apartment?"

Mason's eyes narrowed for a moment in speculation. "What does Aunt Louise say?"

"She doesn't know."

"Anything else to give a clue?"

"Not the slightest."

Mason said, "Okay, I'm going to take a look at 702. You'd better come along, Della."

Mason made excuses to Louise Marlow: "We want to look around on the outside," he said. "We'll be back in a few minutes."

He and Della took the elevator to the seventh floor, walked down to Apartment 702, and Mason pushed the bell button.

They could hear the sound of the buzzer in the apartment, but there was no sound of motion.

Mason said, "It's a chance we shouldn't take, but I'm going to take a peek, just for luck."

He fitted the key to the door, clicked back the lock, and gently opened the door.

The blazing light from the living-room streamed through the open door, showed the body lying on the floor, the drinking glass which had rolled from the dead fingers.

The door from an apartment across the hall jerked open. A young woman with disheveled hair, a bathrobe around her, said angrily, "After you've pressed a buzzer for five minutes at this time of the night you should have sense enough to—"

"We have," Mason interrupted, pulling Della Street into the apartment and kicking the door shut behind them.

Della Street, clinging to Mason's arm, saw the sprawled figure on the floor, the crimson lipstick on the forehead, looked at the overturned chair by the table, the glass which had rolled along the carpet, spilling part of its contents, at the other empty glass standing on the table.

"Careful, Della, we mustn't touch anything."

"Who is he?"

"Apparently he's People's Exhibit A. Do you suppose the nosy dame in the opposite apartment is out of the hall by this time? We'll have to take a chance anyway." He wrapped his hand with his handkerchief, turned the knob on the inside of the door, and pulled it silently open.

The door of the apartment across the hall was closed.

Mason warned Della Street to silence with a gesture. They tiptoed out into the corridor, pulling the door closed behind them.

As the door clicked shut, the elevator came to a stop at the seventh floor. Three men and a woman came hurrying down the corridor.

Mason's voice was low, reassuring: "Perfectly casual, Della. Just friends departing from a late card game."

They caught the curious glances of the four people, and moved slightly to one side until the quartet had passed.

"Well," Della Street said, "they'll certainly know us if they ever see us again. The way that woman looked me over!"

"I know," Mason said, "but we'll hope that—oh—oh! They're going to 702!"

The four paused in front of the door. One of the men pressed the buzzer button.

Almost immediately the door of the opposite apartment jerked open. The woman with the bath-

robe shrilled, "I'm suffering from insomnia. I've been trying to sleep, and this—" She broke off as she saw the strangers.

The man who had been pressing the button grinned and said in a booming voice, "We're sorry, ma'am. I only just gave him one short buzz."

"Well, the other people who went in just before you made enough commotion."

"Other people in here?" the man asked. He hesitated a moment, then went on, "Well, we won't bother him if he's got company."

Mason pushed Della Street into the elevator and pulled the door shut.

"What in the world do we do now?" Della Street asked.

"Now," Mason said, his voice sharp-edged with disappointment, "we ring police headquarters and report a possible homicide. It's the only thing we can do."

There was a phone booth in the lobby. Mason dropped a coin, dialed police headquarters, and reported that he had found a corpse in Apartment 702 under circumstances indicating probable suicide.

While Mason was in the phone booth, the four people came out of the elevator. There was a distinct aroma of alcohol as they pushed their way toward the door. The woman, catching sight of Della Street standing beside the phone booth, favored her with a feminine appraisal.

Mason called Louise Marlow in Apartment 604. "I think you'd better have the doctor take his patients to a sanitarium where they can have complete quiet," he said.

"He seems to think they're doing all right here."

"I distrust doctors who *seem* to think," Mason said. "I would suggest a sanitarium immediately."

Louise Marlow was silent for a full three seconds.

"I think the patients should have *complete quiet*," Mason said.

"Damn it," Louise Marlow sputtered. "When you said it the first time I missed it. The second time I got it. You don't have to let your needle get stuck on the record! I was just trying to figure it out."

Mason heard her slam down the phone at the other end of the line.

Mason grinned, hung up the phone, put the key to 702 in an envelope, addressed the envelope to his office, stamped it, and dropped it in the mailbox by the elevator.

Outside, the four persons in the car were having something of an argument. Apparently there was some sharp difference of opinion as to what action was to be taken next, but as a siren sounded they reached a sudden unanimity of decision. They were starting the car as the police radio car pulled in to the curb. The siren blasted a peremptory summons.

One of the radio officers walked over to the other car, took possession of the ignition keys, and ush-

ered the four people up to the door of the apartment house.

Mason hurried across the lobby to open the locked door.

The officer said, "I'm looking for a man who reported a body."

"That's right. I did. My name's Mason. The body's in 702."

"A body!" the woman screamed.

"Shut up," the radio officer said.

"But we know the—Why, we told you we'd been visiting in 702—We—"

"Yeah, you said you'd been visiting a friend in 702, name of Carver Clements. How was he when you left him?"

There was an awkward silence; then the woman said, "We really didn't get in. We just went to the door. The woman across the way said he had company, so we left."

"Said he had company?"

"That's right. But I think the company had left. It was these two here."

"We'll go take a look," the officer said. "Come on."

Lieutenant Tragg, head of the Homicide Squad, finished his examination of the apartment and said wearily to Mason, "I presume by this time you've thought up a good story to explain how it all happened."

Mason said, "As a matter of fact, I don't know this man from Adam. I had never seen him alive."

"I know," Tragg said sarcastically; "you wanted him as a witness

to an automobile accident and just happened to drop around in the wee, small hours of the morning.

"But," Tragg went on, "strange as it may seem, Mason, I'm interested to know how you got in. The woman who has the apartment across the corridor says you stood there and rang the buzzer for as long as two minutes. Then she heard the sound of a clicking bolt just as she opened her door to give you a piece of her mind."

Mason nodded gravely. "I had a key."

"A key! The hell you did! Let's take a look at it."

"I'm sorry; I don't have it now."

"Well, now," Tragg said, "isn't that interesting! And where did you get the key, Mason?"

Mason said, "The key came into my possession in a peculiar manner. I found it."

"Phooey! That key you have is the dead man's key. When we searched the body we found that stuff on the table there. There's no key to this apartment on him."

Mason sparred for time, said, "And did you notice that despite the fact there's a jar of ice cubes on the table, a bottle of whiskey, and a siphon of soda, the fatal drink didn't have any ice in it?"

"How do you know?" Tragg asked.

"Because when this glass fell from his hand and the contents spilled over the floor, it left a single small spot of moisture. If there

had been ice cubes in the glass they'd have rolled out for some distance and then melted."

"I see," Tragg said sarcastically, "and then, having decided to commit suicide, the guy kissed himself on the forehead and—"

He broke off as one of the detectives, walking down the hallway, said, "We've traced that cleaning mark, Lieutenant."

The man handed Tragg a folded slip of paper.

Tragg unfolded the paper. "Well, I'll be—"

Mason met Tragg's searching eyes with calm steadiness.

"And I suppose," Tragg said, "you're going to be surprised at this one: Miss Fay Allison, Apartment 604, in this same building, is the person who owns the coat that was in the closet. Her mark from the dry cleaner is on it. I think, Mr. Mason, we'll have a little talk with Fay Allison, and just to see that you don't make any false moves until we get there, we'll take you right along with us. Perhaps you already know the way."

As Tragg started toward the elevator, a smartly dressed woman in the late thirties or early forties stepped out of the elevator and walked down the corridor, looking at the numbers over the doors.

Tragg stepped forward. "Looking for something?"

She started to sweep past him.

Tragg pulled back his coat, showed her his badge.

"I'm looking for Apartment 702," she said.

"Whom are you looking for?"

"Mr. Carver Clements, if it's any of your business."

"I think it is," Tragg said. "Who are you and how do you happen to be here?"

She said, "I am Mrs. Carver L. Clements, and I'm here because I was informed over the telephone that my husband was secretly maintaining an apartment here."

"And what," Tragg asked, "did you intend to do?"

"I intend to show him that he isn't getting away with anything," she said. "You may as well accompany me. I feel certain that—"

Tragg said, "702 is down the corridor, at the corner on the right. I just came from there. Your husband was killed some time between seven and nine o'clock tonight."

Dark brown eyes grew wide with surprise. "You—you're sure?"

Tragg said, "Someone slipped him a little cyanide in his whiskey and soda."

She said slowly, "If my husband is dead—I can't believe it. He hated me too much to die. He was trying to force me to make a property settlement, and in order to make me properly submissive, he'd put me through a softening-up process, a period during which I didn't have money enough even to dress decently."

"In other words," Tragg said, "you hated his guts."

She clamped her lips together. "I didn't say that!"

Tragg grinned and said, "Come along with us. We're going down to an apartment on the sixth floor. After that I'm going to take your fingerprints and see if they match up with those on the glass which contained the poison."

Louise Marlow answered the buzzer. She glanced at Tragg, then at Mrs. Clements.

Mason, raising his hat, said with the grave politeness of a stranger, "We're sorry to bother you at this hour, but—"

"I'll do the talking," Tragg said.

The formality of Mason's manner was not lost on Aunt Louise. She said, as though she had never seen him before, "Well, this is a strange time—"

Tragg pushed his way forward. "Does Fay Allison live here?"

"That's right," Louise Marlow beamed at him. "She and another girl, Anita Bonsal, share the apartment. They aren't here now, though."

"Where are they?" Tragg asked.

She shook her head. "I'm sure I couldn't tell you."

"And who are you?"

"I'm Louise Marlow, Fay's aunt."

"You're living with them?"

"Heavens, no, I just came up tonight to be here for—for a visit with Fay."

"You said, I believe, that they are not here now?"

"That's right."

Tragg said, "Let's cut out the shadow-boxing and get down to brass tacks, Mrs. Marlow. I want to see both of those girls."

"I'm sorry, but the girls are both sick. They're in the hospital. It's just a case of food poisoning. Only —"

"What's the doctor's name?"

"Now, you listen to me," Louise Marlow said. "I tell you, these girls are too sick to be bothered and—"

Lieutenant Tragg said, "Carver L. Clements, who has an apartment on the floor above here, is dead. It looks like murder. Fay Allison had evidently been living up there in the apartment with him and—"

"What are you talking about!" Louise Marlow exclaimed indignantly. "Why, I—"

"Take it easy," Tragg said. "Her clothes were up there. There's a cleaner's mark that has been traced to her."

"Clothes!" Louise Marlow snorted. "Why, it's probably some junk she gave away somewhere, or—"

"I'm coming to that," Lieutenant Tragg said patiently. "I don't want to do anyone an injustice. I want to play it on the up-and-up. Now, then, there are fingerprints in that apartment, the fingerprints of a woman on a drinking glass, on the handle of a toothbrush, on a tube of tooth paste. I'm not going to get tough unless I have to, but I want to get hold of Fay Allison long enough to take a set of fingerprints. You try holding out on me, and

see what the newspapers have to say tomorrow."

Louise Marlow reached an instant decision. "You'll find her at the Crestview Sanitarium," she said, "and if you want to make a little money, I'll give you odds of a hundred to one that—"

"I'm not a bettin' man," Tragg said wearily. "I've been in this game too long."

He turned to one of the detectives and said, "Keep Perry Mason and his charming secretary under surveillance and away from a telephone until I get a chance at those fingerprints. Okay, boys, let's go."

Paul Drake, head of the Drake Detective Agency, pulled a sheaf of notes from his pocket as he settled down in the big clients' chair in Mason's office.

"It's a mess, Perry," he said.

"Let's have it," Mason said.

Drake said, "Fay Allison and Dane Grover were going to get married today. Last night Fay and Anita Bonsal, who shares the apartment with her, settled down for a nice, gabby little hen party. They made chocolate. Fay had two cups; Anita had one. Fay evidently got about twice the dose of barbiturate that Anita did. Both girls passed out.

"Next thing Anita knew, Louise Marlow, Fay's aunt, was trying to wake her up. Fay Allison didn't recover consciousness until after she was in the sanitarium.

"Anyhow, Tragg went out and took Fay Allison's fingerprints. They check absolutely with those on the glass. What the police call the murder glass is the one that slipped from Carver Clements's fingers and rolled around the floor. It had been carefully wiped clean of all fingerprints. Police can't even find one of Clements's prints on it. The other glass on the table had Fay's prints. The closet was filled with her clothes. She was living there with him. It's a fine mess.

"Dane Grover is standing by her, but I personally don't think he can stand the gaff much longer. When a man's engaged to a girl and the newspapers scream the details of her affair with a wealthy playboy all over the front pages, you can't expect the man to appear exactly nonchalant. The aunt, Louise Marlow, tells me he's being faced with terrific pressure to repudiate the girl, to break the engagement and take a trip.

"The girls insist it's all part of some sinister over-all plan to frame them, that they were drugged, and all that, but how could anyone have planned it that way? For instance, how could anyone have known they were going to take the chocolate in time to—?"

"The chocolate was drugged?" Mason asked.

Drake nodded. "They'd used up most of the chocolate, but the small amount left in the package is pretty well doped with barbiturate.

"The police theory," Drake went on, "is that Fay Allison had been playing house with Carver Clements. She wanted to get married. Clements wouldn't let her go. She slipped him a little poison. She intended to return and get her things out of the apartment when it got late enough so she wouldn't meet someone in the corridor if she came walking out of 702 with her arms full of clothes. Anita, who had gone out, unexpectedly returned, and that left Fay Allison trapped. She couldn't go up and get her things out of the apartment upstairs without disturbing Anita. So she tried to drug Anita and something went wrong."

"That's a hell of a theory," Mason said.

"Try and get one that fits the case any better," Drake told him. "One thing is certain—Fay Allison was living up there in that Apartment 702. As far as Dane Grover is concerned, that's the thing that will make him throw everything overboard. He's a sensitive chap, from a good family. He doesn't like having his picture in the papers. Neither does his family."

"What about Clements?"

"Successful businessman, broker, speculator. Also a wife who was trying to hook him for a bigger property settlement than Clements wanted to pay. Clements had a big apartment where he lived officially. This place was a playhouse. Only a few people knew he had it. His

wife would have given a lot of money to have found out about it."

"What's the wife doing now?"

"Sitting pretty. They don't know yet whether Clements left a will, but she has her community property rights, and Clements's books will be open for inspection now. He'd been juggling things around pretty much, and now a lot of stuff is going to come out—safe-deposit boxes and things of that sort."

"How about the four people who met us in the hall?"

"I have all the stuff on them here," Drake said. "The men were Richard P. Nolin, a sort of partner in some of Clements's business; Manley L. Ogden, an income tax specialist; Don B. Ralston, who acted as dummy for Clements in some business transactions; and Vera Payson, who is someone's girlfriend, but I'm darned if I can find out whose."

"Anyhow, those people knew of the hideout apartment and would go up there occasionally for a poker game. Last night, as soon as the dame across the hall said Clements had company, they knew what that meant, and went away. That's the story. The newspapers are lapping it up. Dane Grover isn't going to stay put much longer. You can't blame him. All he has is Fay Allison's tearful denial. Louise Marlow says we have to do something fast."

Mason said, "Tragg thinks I had Carver Clements's key."

"Where *did* you get it?"

Mason shook his head.

"Well," Drake said, "Carver Clements didn't have a key."

Mason nodded. "That is the only break we have in the case, Paul. We know Clements's key is missing. No one else does, because Tragg won't believe me when I tell him Clements hadn't given me his key."

Drake said, "It won't take Tragg long to figure the answer to that one. If Clements didn't give you the key, only one other person could have given it to you."

Mason said, "We won't speculate too much on that, Paul."

"I gathered we wouldn't," Drake said dryly. "Remember this, Perry, you're representing a girl who's going to be faced with a murder rap. You may be able to beat that rap. It's circumstantial evidence. But, in doing it, you'll have to think out some explanation that will satisfy an embarrassed lover who's being pitied by his friends and ridiculed by the public."

Mason nodded. "We'll push things to a quick hearing in the magistrate's court on a preliminary examination. In the meantime, Paul, find out everything you can about Carver Clements's background. Pay particular attention to Clements's wife. If she had known about that apartment—"

Drake shook his head dubiously. "I'll give it a once-over, Perry, but if she'd even known about that apartment, that would have been all

she needed. If she could have raided that apartment with a photographer and had the deadwood on Carver Clements, she'd have boosted her property settlement another hundred grand and walked out smiling. She wouldn't have needed to use any poison."

Mason's strong, capable fingers were drumming gently on the edge of the desk. "There has to be *some* explanation, Paul."

Drake heaved himself wearily to his feet. "That's right," he said without enthusiasm, "and Tragg thinks he has it."

Della Street, her eyes sparkling, entered Mason's private office and said, "He's here, Chief?"

"Who's here?" Mason asked.

She laughed. "Don't be like that. As far as this office is concerned, there is only one *he*."

"Dane Grover?"

"That's right."

"What sort?"

"Tall, sensitive-looking. Wavy dark brown hair, romantic eyes. He's crushed, of course. You can see he's dying ten thousand deaths every time he meets one of his friends. Gertie, at the switchboard, can't take her eyes off of him."

Mason grinned, and said, "Let's get him in, then, before Gertie either breaks up a romance or dies of unrequited love."

Della Street went out, returned after a few moments, ushering Dane Grover into the office.

Mason shook hands, invited Grover to a seat. Grover glanced dubiously at Della Street. Mason smiled. "She's my right hand, Grover. She takes notes for me, and keeps her thoughts to herself."

Grover said, "I suppose I'm unduly sensitive, but I can't stand it when people patronize or pity me."

Mason nodded.

"I've had them do both ever since the papers came out this morning."

Again, Mason's answer was merely a nod.

"But," Grover went on, "I want you to know that I'll stick."

Mason thought that over for a moment, then held Grover's eyes. "For how long?"

"All the way."

"No matter what the evidence shows?"

Grover said, "The evidence shows the woman I love was living with Carver Clements as his mistress. The evidence simply can't be right. I love her, and I'm going to stick. I want you to tell her that, and I want you to know that. What you're going to have to do will take money. I'm here to see that you have what money you need—all you want, in fact."

"That's fine," Mason said. "Primarily, what I need is a little moral support. I want to be able to tell Fay Allison that you're sticking, and I want some facts."

"What facts?"

"How long have you been going with Fay Allison?"

"A matter of three or four months. Before then I was—well, sort of squiring both of the girls around."

"You mean Anita Bonsal?"

"Yes. I met Anita first. I went with her for a while. Then I went with both. Then I began to gravitate toward Fay Allison. I thought I was just making dates. Actually, I was falling in love."

"And Anita?"

"She's like a sister to both of us. She's been simply grand in this whole thing. She's promised me that she'll do everything she can."

"Could Fay Allison have been living with Carver Clements?"

"She had the physical opportunity, if that's what you mean."

"You didn't see her every night?"

"No."

"What does Anita say?"

"Anita says the charge is ridiculous."

"Do you know of any place where Fay Allison could have had access to cyanide of potassium?"

"That's what I wanted to tell you about, Mr. Mason. Out at my place the gardener uses it. I don't know just what for, but—well, out there the other day, when he was showing Fay around the place—"

"Yes, yes," Mason said impatiently, as Grover paused; "go on."

"Well, I know the gardener told her to be very careful not to touch that sack because it contained cyanide. I remember she asked him a few questions about what he used

it for, but I wasn't paying much attention. It's the basis of some sort of spray."

"Has your gardener read the papers?"

Grover nodded.

"Can you trust him?"

"Yes. He's very loyal to all our family. He's been with us for twenty years."

"What's his name?"

"Barney Sheff. My mother—well, rehabilitated him."

"He'd been in trouble? In the pen?"

"That's right. He had a chance to get parole if he could get a job. Mother gave him the job."

"I'm wondering if you have fully explored the possibilities of orchid growing."

"We're not interested in orchid growing. We can buy them and—"

"I wonder," Mason said in exactly the same tone, "if you have fully investigated the possibilities of growing orchids."

"You mean—Oh, you mean we should send Barney Sheff to—"

"Fully investigated the possibilities of growing orchids," Mason said again.

Dane Grover studied Mason silently for a few seconds. Then abruptly he rose from the chair, extended his hand, and said, "I wanted you to understand, Mr. Mason, that I'm going to stick. I brought you some money. I thought you might need it." He carelessly tossed an envelope on the table. And with

that he turned and marched out of the office.

Mason reached for the envelope Grover had tossed on his desk. It was well filled with hundred-dollar bills.

Della Street came over to take the money. "When I get so interested in a man," she said, "that I neglect to count the money, you know I'm becoming incurably romantic. How much, Chief?"

"Plenty," Mason said.

Della Street was counting it when the unlisted telephone on her desk rang. She picked up the receiver, and heard Drake's voice on the line. "Hi, Paul," she said.

"Hi, Della. Perry there?"

"Yes."

"Okay," Drake said wearily, "I'm making a progress report. Tell him Lieutenant Tragg nabbed the Grover gardener, a chap by the name of Sheff. They're holding him as a material witness, seem to be all worked up about what they've discovered. Can't find out what it is."

Della Street sat motionless at the desk, holding the receiver.

"Hello, hello," Drake said; "are you there?"

"I'm here," Della said. "I'll tell him." She hung up the phone.

It was after nine o'clock that night when Della Street, signing the register in the elevator, was whisked up to the floor where Perry Mason had his offices. She start-

ed to look in on Paul Drake, then changed her mind and kept on walking down the long, dark corridor, the rapid tempo of her heels echoing back at her.

She rounded the elbow in the corridor, and saw that lights were on in Mason's office.

The lawyer was pacing the floor, thumbs pushed in the armholes of his vest, head shoved forward, wrapped in such concentration that he did not even notice the opening of the door.

The desk was littered with photographs. There were numerous sheets of the flimsy which Paul Drake used in making reports.

Della stood quietly in the doorway, watching the tall, lean-waisted man pacing back and forth. Granite-hard of face, the seething action of his restless mind demanded a physical outlet, and this restless pacing was just an unconscious reflex.

After almost a minute Della Street said, "Hello, Chief. Can I help?"

Mason looked up at her with a start. "What are you doing here?"

"I came up to see if there was anything I could do to help. Had any dinner?" she asked.

He glanced at his wrist watch, said, "Not yet."

"What time is it?" Della Street asked.

He had to look at his wrist watch again in order to tell her. "Nine forty."

She laughed. "I knew you didn't even look the first time you went through the motions. Come on, Chief; you've got to go get something to eat. The case will still be here when you get back."

"How do we know it will?" Mason said. "I've been talking with Louise Marlow on the phone. She's been in touch with Dane Grover and she knows Dane Grover's mother. Dane Grover says he'll stick. How does *he* know what he'll do? He's never faced a situation like this. His friends, his relatives, are turning the knife in the wound with their sympathy. How can he tell whether he'll stick?"

"Just the same," Della Street insisted, "I think he will. It's through situations such as this that character is created."

"You're just talking to keep your courage up," Mason said. "The guy's undergoing the tortures of the damned. He can't help but be influenced by the evidence. The woman he loves on the night before the wedding trying to free herself from the man who gave her money and a certain measure of security."

"Chief, you simply *have* to eat."

Mason walked over to the desk. "Look at 'em," he said; "photographs! And Drake had the devil's own time obtaining them. They're copies of the police photographs—the body on the floor, glass on the table, an overturned chair, a newspaper half open by a reading chair

—an apartment as drab as the sordid affair for which it was used. And somewhere in those photographs I've got to find the clue that will establish the innocence of a woman, not only innocence of murder, but of the crime of betraying the man she loved."

Mason leaned over the desk, picked up the magnifying glass which was on his blotter, and started once more examining the pictures. "Hang it, Della," he said, "I think the thing's here somewhere. That glass on the table, a little whiskey and soda in the bottom, Fay Allison's fingerprints all over it. Then there's the brazen touch of that crimson kiss on the forehead."

"Indicating a woman was with him just before he died?"

"Not necessarily. That lipstick is a perfect imprint of a pair of lips. There was no lipstick on his lips, just there on the forehead. A shrewd man could well have smeared lipstick on his lips, pressed them against Clements's forehead after the poison had taken effect, and so directed suspicion away from himself. This could easily have happened, if the man had known some woman was in the habit of visiting Clements in that apartment.

"It's a clue that so obviously indicates a woman that I find myself getting suspicious of it. If there were only something to give me a starting point. If only we had more time."

Della Street walked over to the desk. She said, "Stop it. Come and get something to eat. Let's talk it over."

"Haven't you had dinner?"

She smiled, and shook her head. "I knew you'd be working, and that if someone didn't rescue you, you'd be pacing the floor until two or three o'clock in the morning. What's Paul Drake found out?"

She picked up the sheets of flimsy, placed them together, and anchored everything in place with a paperweight. "Come on, Chief."

But he didn't really answer her question until after he had relaxed in one of the booths in their favorite restaurant. He pushed back the plates containing the wreckage of a thick steak, and poured more coffee, then said, "Drake hasn't found out much—just background."

"What, for instance?"

Mason said wearily, "It's the same old seven and six. The wife, Marline Austin Clements, apparently was swept off her feet by the sheer power of Carver Clements's determination to get her. She overlooked the fact that after he had her safely listed as one of his legal chattels, he used that same acquisitive, aggressive tenacity of purpose to get other things he wanted. Marline was left pretty much alone."

"And so?" Della asked.

"And so," Mason said, "in the course of time, Carver Clements turned to other interests. Hang it, Della, we have one thing to work

on, only one thing—the fact that Clements had no key on his body.

"You remember the four people who met us in the corridor. They had to get in that apartment house some way. Remember the outer door was locked. Any of the tenants could release the latch by pressing the button of an electric release. But if the tenant of some apartment didn't press the release button, it was necessary to have a key in order to get in.

"Now, then, those four people got in. How? Regardless of what they say now, one of them must have had a key."

"The missing key?" Della asked.

"That's what we have to find out."

"What story did they give the police?"

"I don't know. The police have them sewed up tight. I've got to get one of them on the stand and cross-examine him. Then we'll at least have something to go on."

"So we have to try for an immediate hearing and then go it blind?"

"That's about the size it."

"Was that key in Fay Allison's purse Clements's missing key?"

"It could have been. If so, either Fay was playing house or the key was planted. In that case, when was it planted, how, and by whom? I'm inclined to think Clements's key must have been on his body at the time he was murdered. It wasn't there when the police arrived. That's the one significant clue.

Della Street shook her head. "It's too deep for me, but I guess you're going to have to really wade into it."

Mason lit a cigarette. "Ordinarily I'd spar for time, but in this case I'm afraid time is our enemy, Della. We're going to have to walk into court with all the assurance in the world and pull a very large rabbit out of a very small hat."

She smiled. "Where do we get the rabbit?"

"Back in the office," he said, "studying those photographs, looking for a clue, and—" Suddenly he snapped to attention.

"What is it, Chief?"

"I was just thinking. The glass on the table in 702—there was a little whiskey and soda in the bottom of it, just a spoonful or two."

"Well?" she asked.

"What happens when you drink whiskey and soda, Della?"

"Why—you always leave a little. It sticks to the side of the glass and then gradually settles back."

Mason shook his head. His eyes were glowing now. "You leave ice cubes in the glass," he said, "and then after a while they melt and leave an inch or so of water."

She matched his excitement. "Then there was no ice in the woman's glass?"

"And none in Carver Clements's. Yet there was a jar of ice cubes on the table. Come on, Della; we're going back and *really* study those photographs!"

Judge Randolph Jordan ascended the bench and rapped court to order.

"People versus Fay Allison."

"Ready for the defendant," Mason said.

"Ready for the Prosecution," Stewart Linn announced.

Linn, one of the best of the trial deputies in the district attorney's office, was a steely-eyed individual who had the legal knowledge of an encyclopedia, and the cold-blooded mercilessness of a steel trap.

Linn was under no illusions as to the resourcefulness of his adversary, and he had all the caution of a boxer approaching a heavyweight champion.

"Call Dr. Charles Keene," he said.

Dr. Keene came forward, qualified himself as a physician and surgeon who had had great experience in medical necropsies, particularly in cases of homicide.

"On the tenth of this month did you have occasion to examine a body in Apartment 702 at the Mandrake Arms?"

"I did."

"What time was it?"

"It was about two o'clock in the morning."

"What did you find?"

"I found the body of a man of approximately fifty-two years of age, fairly well fleshed, quite bald, but otherwise very well preserved for a man of his age. The body was lying on the floor, head toward the door,

feet toward the interior of the apartment, the left arm doubled up and lying under him, the right arm flung out, the left side of the face resting on the carpet. The man had been dead for several hours. I fix the time of death as having taken place during a period between seven o'clock and nine o'clock that evening. I cannot place the time of death any closer than that, but I will swear that it took place within those time limits."

"And did you determine the cause of death?"

"Not at that time. I did later."

"What was the cause of death?"

"Poisoning caused by the ingestion of cyanide of potassium."

"Did you notice anything about the physical appearance of the man's body?"

"There was a red smear on the upper part of the forehead, apparently caused by lips that had been heavily coated with lipstick and then pressed against the skin in a somewhat puckered condition. It was as though some woman had administered a last kiss."

"Cross-examine," Linn announced.

"No questions," Mason said.

"Call Benjamin Harlan," Linn said.

Benjamin Harlan, a huge, lumbering giant of a man, promptly proceeded to qualify himself as a fingerprint and identification expert of some twenty years' experience.

Stewart Linn, by skillful, adroit questions, led him through an account of his activities on the date in question. Harlan found no latent fingerprints on the glass which the Prosecution referred to as the "murder glass," indicating this glass had been wiped clean of prints; but there were prints on the glass on the table which the Prosecution referred to as the "decoy glass," on the toothbrush, on the tube of tooth paste, and on various other articles. These latent fingerprints had coincided with the fingerprints taken from the hands of Fay Allison, the defendant.

Harlan also identified a whole series of photographs taken by the police showing the position of the body when it was discovered, the furnishings in the apartment, the table, the overturned chair, the so-called murder glass, which had rolled along the floor, the so-called decoy glass on the table, which bore unmistakably the fresh fingerprints of Fay Allison, the bottle of whiskey, the bottle of soda water, the jar containing ice cubes.

"Cross-examine," Linn said triumphantly.

Mason said, "You have had some twenty years' experience as a fingerprint expert, Mr. Harlan?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, you have heard Dr. Keene's testimony about the lipstick on the forehead of the dead man?"

"Yes, sir."

"And that lipstick, I believe, shows in this photograph which I now hand you?"

"Yes, sir; not only that, but I have a close-up of that lipstick stain which I, myself, took. I have an enlargement of that negative, in case you're interested."

"I'm very much interested," Mason said. "Will you produce the enlargement, please?"

Harlan produced the photograph from his brief-case, showing a section of the forehead of the dead man, with the stain of lips outlined clearly and in microscopic detail.

"What is the scale of this photograph?" Mason asked.

"Life size," Harlan said. "I have a standard of distances by which I can take photographs to a scale of exactly life size."

"Thank you," Mason said. "I'd like to have this photograph received in evidence."

"No objection," Linn said.

"And it is, is it not, a matter of fact that the little lines shown in this photograph are fully as distinctive as the ridges and whorls of a fingerprint?"

"Just what do you mean?"

"Isn't it a fact well known to identification experts that the little wrinkles which form in a person's lips are fully as individual as the lines of a fingerprint?"

"It's not a 'well-known' fact."

"But it is a fact?"

"Yes, sir, it is."

"So that by measuring the dis-

tance between the little lines which are shown on this photograph, indicating the pucker lines of the skin, it would be fully as possible to identify the lips which made this lipstick print as it would be to identify a person who had left a fingerprint upon the scalp of the dead man."

"Yes, sir."

"Now, you have testified to having made imprints of the defendant's fingers and compared those with the fingerprints found on the glass."

"Yes, sir."

"Have you made any attempt to take an imprint of her lips and compare that print with the print of the lipstick on the decedent?"

"No, sir," Harlan said, shifting his position uneasily.

"Why not?"

"Well, in the first place, Mr. Mason, the fact that the pucker lines of lips are so highly individualized is not a generally known fact."

"But *you* knew it."

"Yes, sir."

"And the more skilled experts in your profession know it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why didn't you do it, then?"

Harlan glanced somewhat helplessly at Stewart Linn.

"Oh, if the Court please," Linn said, promptly taking his cue from that glance, "this hardly seems to be cross-examination. The inquiry is wandering far afield. I will object to the question on the ground

that it's incompetent, irrelevant, immaterial, and not proper cross-examination."

"Overruled," Judge Jordan snapped. "Answer the question!"

Harlan cleared his throat. "Well," he said, "I just never thought of it."

"Think of it now," Mason said. "Go ahead and take the imprint right now and right here. . . . Put on plenty of lipstick, Miss Allison. Let's see how your lips compare with those on the dead man's forehead."

"Oh, if the Court please," Linn said wearily, "this hardly seems to be cross-examination. If Mr. Mason wants to make Harlan his own witness and call for this test as a part of the defendant's case, that will be one thing; but this certainly isn't cross-examination."

"It may be cross-examination of Harlan's qualifications as an expert," Judge Jordan ruled.

"Oh, if the Court please! Isn't that stretching a technicality rather far?"

"Your objection was highly technical," Judge Jordan snapped. "It is overruled, and my ruling will stand. Take the impression, Mr. Harlan."

Fay Allison, with trembling hand, daubed lipstick heavily on her mouth. Then, using the make-up mirror in her purse, smoothed on the lipstick with the tip of her little finger.

"Go ahead," Mason said to Harlan; "check on her lips."

Harlan, taking a piece of white paper from his brief-case, moved down to where the defendant was sitting beside Perry Mason and pressed the paper against her lips. He removed the paper and examined the imprint.

"Go ahead," Mason said to Harlan; "make your comparison and announce the results to the Court."

Harlan said, "Of course, I have not the facilities here for making a microscopic comparison, but I can tell from even a superficial examination of the lip lines that these lips did not make that print."

"Thank you," Mason said. "That's all."

Judge Jordan was interested. "These lines appear in the lips only when the lips are puckered, as in giving a kiss?"

"No, Your Honor, they are in the lips all the time, as an examination will show, but when the lips are puckered, the lines are intensified."

"And these lip markings are different with each individual?"

"Yes, Your Honor."

"So that you are now prepared to state to the Court that despite the fingerprints of the defendant on the glass and other objects, her lips definitely could not have left the imprint on the dead man's forehead?"

"Yes, Your Honor."

"That's all," Judge Jordan said.

"Of course," Linn pointed out, "the fact that the defendant did not leave that kiss imprint on the man's

forehead doesn't necessarily mean a thing, Your Honor. In fact, he may have met his death *because* the defendant found that lipstick on his forehead. The evidence of the fingerprints is quite conclusive that the defendant was in that apartment."

"The Court understands the evidence. Proceed with your case," Judge Jordan said.

"Furthermore," Linn went on angrily, "I will now show the Court that there was every possibility the print of that lipstick could have been deliberately planted by none other than the attorney for the defendant and his charming and very efficient secretary. I will proceed to prove that by calling Don B. Ralston to the stand."

Ralston came forward and took the stand, his manner that of a man who wished he were many miles away.

"Your name is Don B. Ralston? You reside at 2935 Creelmere Avenue in this city?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you knew Carver L. Clements in his lifetime?"

"Yes."

"In a business way?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, on the night—or, rather, early in the morning—of the 10th of this month, did you have occasion to go to Carver Clements's apartment, being Apartment Number 702 in the Mandrake Arms Apartments in this city?"

"I did, yes, sir."

"What time was it?"

"Around—well, it was between one and two in the morning—I would say around one thirty."

"Were you alone?"

"No, sir."

"Who was with you?"

"Richard P. Nolin, who is a business associate—or was a business associate—of Mr. Clements; Manley L. Ogden, who handled some of Mr. Clements's income tax work; and a Miss Vera Payson, a friend of—well, a friend of all of us."

"What happened when you went to that apartment?"

"Well, we left the elevator on the seventh floor, and as we were walking down the corridor, I noticed two people coming down the corridor toward us."

"Now, when you say 'down the corridor,' do you mean from the direction of Apartment 702?"

"That's right, yes, sir."

"And who were these people?"

"Mr. Perry Mason and his secretary, Miss Street."

"And did you actually enter the apartment of Carver Clements?"

"I did not."

"Why not?"

"When I got to the door of Apartment 702, I pushed the doorbell and heard the sound of the buzzer on the inside of the apartment. Almost instantly the door of an apartment across the hall opened, and a woman complained that she had been

unable to sleep because of people ringing the buzzer of that apartment, and stated, in effect, that other people were in there with Mr. Clements. So we left immediately."

"Now, then, Your Honor," Stewart Linn said, "I propose to show that the two people referred to by the person living in the apartment across the hallway were none other than Mr. Mason and Miss Street, who had actually entered the apartment and were in there with the dead man and the evidence for an undetermined length of time."

"Go ahead and show it," Judge Jordan said.

"Just a moment," Mason said. "Before you do that, I want to cross-examine this witness."

"Cross-examine him, then."

"When you arrived at the Mandrake Arms, Mr. Ralston, the door to the street was locked, was it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you do?"

"We went up to the seventh floor and—"

"I understand that, but how did you get in? How did you get past the entrance door? You had a key, didn't you?"

"No, sir."

"Then how *did* you get in?"

"Why *you* let us in."

"I did?"

"Yes."

"Understand," Mason said, "I am not now referring to the time you came up from the street in the cus-

tody of the radio officer. I am now referring to the time when you *first* entered that apartment house on the morning of the tenth of this month."

"Yes, sir. I understand. You let us in."

"What makes you say that?"

"Well, because you and your secretary were in Carver Clements's apartment, and—"

"You, yourself, don't *know* we were in there, do you?"

"Well, I surmise it. We met you just after you had left the apartment. You were hurrying down the hall toward the elevator."

Mason said, "I don't want your surmises. You don't even know I had been in that apartment. I want you to tell us how you got past the locked street door."

"We pressed the button of Carver Clements's apartment, and you—or, at any rate, someone—answered by pressing the button which released the electric door catch on the outer door. As soon as we heard the buzzing sound, which indicated the lock was released, we pushed the door open and went in."

"Let's not have any misunderstanding about this," Mason said. "Who was it pushed the button of Carver Clements's apartment?"

"I did."

"I'm talking now about the button in front of the outer door of the apartment."

"Yes, sir."

"And having pressed that button,

you waited until the buzzer announced the door was being opened?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long?"

"Not over a second or two."

Mason said to the witness, "One more question: Did you go right up after you entered the house?"

"We—no, sir, not *right* away. We stopped for a few moments there in the lobby to talk about the type of poker we wanted to play. Miss Payson had lost money on one of these wild poker games where the dealer has the opportunity of calling any kind of game he wants, some of them having the one-eyed Jacks wild, and things of that sort."

"How long were you talking?"

"Oh, a couple of minutes."

"And then went right up?"

"Yes."

"Where was the elevator?"

"The elevator was on one of the upper floors. I remember we pressed the button and it took a little while to come down to where we were."

"That's all," Mason said.

Della Street's fingers dug into his arm. "Aren't you going to ask him about the key?" she whispered.

"Not yet," Mason said, a light of triumph in his eyes. "I know what happened now, Della. Give us the breaks, and we've got this case in the bag. First, make him prove we were in that apartment."

Linn said, "I will now call Miss Shirley Tanner to the stand."

The young woman who advanced to the stand was very different from the disheveled and nervous individual who had been so angry at the time Mason and Della Street had pressed the button of apartment 702.

"Your name is Shirley Tanner, and you reside in Apartment 701 of the Mandrake Arms Apartments?"

"Yes, sir."

"And have for how long?"

She smiled, and said, "Not very long. I put in three weeks apartment hunting and finally secured a lease on Apartment 701 on the afternoon of the eighth. I moved in on the ninth, which explains why I was tired almost to the point of hysterics."

"You had difficulty sleeping?"

"Yes."

"And on the morning of the ninth did you have any experiences which annoyed you—experiences in connection with the ringing of the buzzer in the apartment next door?"

"I most certainly did, yes, sir."

"Tell us exactly what happened."

"I had been taking sleeping medicine from time to time, but for some reason or other this night I was so nervous the sleeping medicine didn't do me any good. I had been unpacking, and my nerves were all keyed up. I was physically and mentally exhausted but I was too tired to sleep."

"Well, I was trying to sleep, and think I had just got to sleep when

I was awakened by a continual sounding of the buzzer in the apartment across the hall. It was a low, persistent noise which became very irritating in my nervous state."

"Go on," Linn said. "What did you do?"

"I finally got up and put on a robe and went to the door and flung it open. I was terribly angry at the very idea of people making so much noise at that hour of the morning. You see, those apartments aren't too soundproof and there is a ventilating system over the doors of the apartments. The one over the door of 702 was apparently open and I had left mine open for nighttime ventilation. And then I was angry at myself for getting so upset over the noise. I knew it would prevent me from sleeping at all, which is why I lay still for what seemed an interminable time before I opened the door."

Linn smiled. "And you say you *flung* open the door?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you find?"

"Two people across the hall."

"Did you recognize them?"

"I didn't know them at the time, but I know them now."

"Who were they?"

She pointed a dramatic finger at Perry Mason. "Mr. Perry Mason, the lawyer for the defendant, and the young woman, I believe his secretary, who is sitting there beside him—not the defendant, but the woman on the other side."

"Miss Della Street," Mason said with a bow.

"Thank you," she said.

"And," Linn went on, "what did you see those people do?"

She said, "I saw them enter the apartment."

"Did you see how they entered the apartment—I mean, how did they get the door open?"

"They must have used a key. Mr. Mason was just pushing the door open and I—"

"No surmises, please," Linn broke in. "Did you actually see Mr. Mason using a key?"

"Well, I heard him."

"What do you mean?"

"As I was opening my door I heard metal rasping against metal, the way a key does when it scrapes against a lock. And then, when I had my door all the way open, I saw Mr. Mason pushing his way into 702."

"But you only know he must have had a key because you heard the sound of metal rubbing against metal?"

"Yes, and the click of the lock."

"Did you say anything to—Mr. Mason and Miss Street?"

"I most certainly did, and then I slammed the door and went back and tried to sleep. But I was so mad by that time I couldn't keep my eyes closed."

"What happened after that?"

"After that, when I was trying to sleep—I would say just a few seconds after that—I heard that buzz-

er again. This time I was good and mad."

"And what did you do?"

"I swung open the door and started to give these people a piece of my mind."

"People?"

"There were four people standing there. The Mr. Ralston, who has just testified, two other men, and woman. They were standing there at the doorway, jabbing away at the button, and I told them this was sweet time to be calling on someone and making a racket, and that any way the gentleman already has company, so if he didn't answer his door, it was because he didn't want to."

"Did you at that time see Mr. Mason and Miss Street walking down the corridor?"

"No. I did not. I had my door open only far enough to show me the door of Apartment 702 across the way."

"Thank you," Linn said. "Now you distinctly saw Mr. Mason and Miss Street enter that apartment?"

"Yes."

"And close the door behind them?"

"Yes."

"Cross-examine!" Linn said triumphantly.

Mason, taking a notebook from his pocket, walked up to stand beside Shirley Tanner. "Miss Tanner," he said, "are you certain that you heard me rub metal against the keyhole of that door?"

"Certain," she said.

"My back was toward you?"

"It was when I first opened my door, yes. I saw your face, however, just after you turned in the door. You turned around and looked at me over your shoulder."

"Oh, we'll stipulate," Linn said, with an exaggerated note of weariness in his voice, "that the witness couldn't see through Mr. Mason's back. Perhaps learned counsel was carrying the key in his teeth."

"Thank you," Mason said, turning toward Linn. Then, suddenly stepping forward, he clapped his notebook against Shirley Tanner's face.

The witness screamed and tumbled back.

Linn was on his feet. "What are you trying to do?" he shouted.

Judge Jordan pounded with his gavel. "Mr. Mason!" he reprimanded. "That is contempt of court!"

Mason said, "Please let me explain, Your Honor. The Prosecution took the lip-prints of my client. I feel that I am entitled to take the lip-prints of this witness. I will cheerfully admit to being in contempt of court, in the event I am wrong, but I would like to extend his imprint of Shirley Tanner's lips to Mr. Benjamin Harlan, the identification expert, and ask him whether or not the print made by these lips is not the same as that of the lipstick kiss which was found on the dead forehead of Carver L. Clements."

There was a tense, dramatic silence in the courtroom.

Mason stepped forward and handed the notebook to Benjamin Harlan.

From the witness stand came a shrill scream of terror. Shirley Tanner tried to get to her feet. Her eyes were wide and terrified, her face was the color of putty.

She couldn't make it. Her knees buckled. She tried to catch herself, then fell to the floor. . . .

It was when order was restored in the courtroom that Perry Mason exploded his second bombshell.

"Your Honor," he said, "either Fay Allison is innocent or she is guilty. If she is innocent, someone framed the evidence which would discredit her. And if someone did frame that evidence, there is only one person who could have had access to the defendant's apartment, one person who could have transported glasses, toothbrushes, and tooth paste containing Fay Allison's fingerprints, one person who could have transported clothes bearing the unmistakable stamp of ownership of the defendant in this case. . . . Your Honor, I request that Anita Bonsal be called to the stand."

There was a moment's silence.

Anita Bonsal, there in the courtroom, felt suddenly as though she had been stripped stark naked by one swift gesture. One moment, she had been sitting there, attempting

to keep pace with the swift rush of developments. The next moment, everyone in the courtroom was seeking her out with staring, prying eyes.

In her sudden surge of panic, Anita did the worst thing she could possibly have done: she ran.

They were after her then, a throng of humanity, motivated only by the mass instinct to pursue that which ran for cover.

Anita dashed to the stairs, went scrambling down them, found herself in another hallway in the Hall of Justice. She dashed the length of that hallway, frantically trying to find the stairs. She could not find them.

An elevator offered her a haven. "What's the hurry?" the attendant asked.

Shreds of reason were beginning to return to Anita's fear-racked mind. "They're calling my case," she said. "Let me off at—"

"I know," the man said, smiling. "Third floor. Domestic Relations Court."

He slid the cage to a smooth stop at the third floor. "Out to the left," he said. "Department Twelve."

Anita's mind was beginning to work now. She smiled at the elevator attendant, walked rapidly to the left, pushed open a door, and entered the partially filled courtroom. She marched down the center aisle and calmly seated herself in the middle seat in a row of benches.

She was now wrapped in ano-

nymity. Only her breathlessness and the pounding of her pulse gave indication that she was the quarry for which the crowd was now searching.

Then slowly the triumphant smile faded from her face. The realization of the effect of what she had done stabbed her consciousness. She had admitted her guilt. She could flee now to the farthest corners of the earth, but her guilt would always follow her.

Perry Mason had shown that she had not killed Carver Clements but he had also shown that she had done something which in the mind of all men would be even worse. She had betrayed her friend. She had tried to ruin Fay Allison's reputation. She had attempted the murder of her own roommate by giving her an overdose of sleeping tablets.

How much would Mason have been able to prove? She had no way of knowing. But there was no need for him to prove anything now. Her flight had given Mason all the proof he needed.

She must disappear, and that would not be easy. By evening her photograph would be emblazoned upon the pages of every newspaper in the city. . . .

Back in the courtroom, almost deserted now except for the county officials who were crowding around Shirley Tanner, Mason was asking questions in a low voice.

There was no more stamina left

in Shirley Tanner than in a wet dishrag. She heard her own voice answering the persistent drone of Mason's searching questions.

"You knew that Clements had this apartment in 702? . . . You deliberately made such a high offer that you were able to sublease Apartment 701? . . . You were suspicious of Clements and wanted to spy on him?"

"Yes," Shirley said, and her voice was barely audible.

"You were furious when you realized that Carver Clements had *another* mistress and that all his talk to you about waiting until he could get his divorce was merely bait which you had grabbed?"

Again she said, "Yes." There was no strength in her any more to think up lies.

"You made the mistake of loving him," Mason said. "It wasn't his money you were after, and you administered the poison. How did you do it, Shirley?"

She said, "I'd poisoned the drink I held in my hand. I knew it made Carver furious when I drank, because whiskey makes me lose control of myself, and he never knew what I was going to do when I was drunk.

"I rang his bell, holding that glass in my hand. I leered at him tipsily when he opened the door, and walked on in. I said, 'Hello, Carver darling. Meet your next-door neighbor,' and I raised the glass to my lips.

"He acted just as I knew he would. He was furious. He said, 'You little devil, what're you doing here? I've told you I'll do the drinking for both of us.' He snatched the glass from me and drained it."

"What happened?" Mason asked.

"For a moment, nothing," she said. "He went back to the chair and sat down. I leaned over him and pressed that kiss on his head. It was a goodbye kiss. He looked at me, frowned; then suddenly he jumped to his feet and tried to run to the door, but he staggered and fell face forward."

"And what did you do?"

"I took the key to his apartment from his pocket so I could get back in to fix things the way I wanted and get possession of the glass, but I was afraid to be there while he was—dying."

Mason nodded. "You went back to your own apartment, and then, after you had waited a few minutes and thought it was safe to go back, you couldn't, because Anita Bonsal was at the door?"

She nodded, and said, "She had a key. She went in. I supposed, of course, she'd call the police and that they'd come at any time. I didn't dare to go in there then. Finally, I decided the police weren't coming. It was past midnight then."

"So then you went back in there? You were in there when Don Ralston rang the bell. You—"

"Yes," she said. "I went back into that apartment. By that time I had

put on a bathrobe and pajamas and ruffled my hair all up. If anyone had said anything to me, if I had been caught, I had a story all prepared to tell them, that I had heard the door open and someone run down the corridor, that I had opened my door and found the door of 702 ajar, and I had just that minute looked in to see what had happened."

"All right," Mason said; "that was your story. What did you do?"

"I went in and wiped all my fingerprints off the glass on the floor. Then the buzzer sounded from the street."

"What did you do?"

She said, "I saw someone had fixed up the evidence just the way I had been going to fix it up. A bottle of whiskey on the table, a bottle of soda, a jar of ice cubes."

"So what did you do?"

She said, "I was rattled, I guess, so I just automatically pushed the button which released the downstairs door catch. Then I ducked back into my own apartment, and hadn't any more than got in when I heard the elevator stop at the seventh floor. I couldn't understand that, because I knew these people couldn't possibly have had time enough to get up to the seventh floor in the elevator. I waited, listening, and heard you two come down the corridor. As soon as the buzzer sounded in the other apartment, I opened the door to chase you away, but you were actually

entering the apartment, so I had to make a quick excuse, that the sound of the buzzer had wakened me. Then I jerked the door shut. When the four people came up, I thought you were still in the apartment, and I had to see what was happening."

"How long had you known him?" Mason asked.

She said sadly, "I loved him. I was the one that he wanted to marry when he left his wife. I don't know how long this other romance had been going on. I became suspicious, and one time when I had an opportunity to go through his pockets, I found a key stamped, 'Mandrake Arms Apartment, Number 702.' Then I thought I knew, but I wanted to be sure. I found out who had Apartment 701 and made a proposition for a sublease.

"I waited and watched. This brunette walked down the corridor and used *her* key to open the apartment. I slipped out into the corridor and listened at the door. I heard him give her the same old line he'd given me so many times, and I hated him. I killed him—and I was caught."

Mason turned to Stewart Linn and said, "There you are, young man. There's your murderess, but you'll probably never be able to get a jury to think it's anything more than manslaughter."

A much chastened Linn said, "Would you mind telling me how you figured this out, Mr. Mason?"

Mason said; "Clements's key was missing. Obviously he must have had it when he entered the apartment. Therefore, the murderer must have taken it from his pocket. Why? So he or she could come back. And if what Don Ralston said was true, *someone* must have been in the apartment when he rang the bell from the street, someone who let him in by pressing the buzzer.

"What happened to that someone? I must have been walking down the corridor within a matter of seconds after Ralston had pressed the button on the street door. Yet I saw no one leaving the apartment. *Obviously, then, the person who pressed the buzzer must have had a place to take refuge in a nearby apartment!*

"Having learned that a young, attractive woman had only that day taken a lease on the apartment opposite, the answer became so obvious it ceased to be a mystery."

Stewart Linn nodded thoughtfully. "It all fits in," he said.

Mason picked up his brief-case. "Come on, Della," he said. "Let's get Fay Allison and—"

He stopped as he saw Fay Allison's face. "What's happened to *your* lipstick?" he asked.

And then his eyes moved over to take in Dane Grover, who was standing by her, his face smeared diagonally across the mouth with a huge, red smear of lipstick.

Fay Allison had neglected to re-

move the thick coating of lipstick which she had put on when Mason had asked Benjamin Harlan, the identification expert, to take an imprint of her lips. Now, the heavy mark where her mouth had been pressed against the mouth of Dane Grover gave a note of incongruity to the entire proceedings.

On the lower floors a mob of eagerly curious spectators were baying like hounds upon the track of Anita Bonsal. In the courtroom the long, efficient arm of the law was gathering Shirley Tanner into its grasp, and there, amidst the machinery of tragedy, the romance of Fay Allison and Dane Grover picked up where it had left off. . . .

It was the gavel of Judge Randolph Jordan that brought them back to the grim realities of justice.

"The Court," announced Judge Jordan, "will dismiss the case against Fay Allison. The Court will order Shirley Tanner into custody, and the Court will suggest to the Prosecutor that a complaint be issued for Anita Bonsal, upon such charge as may seem expedient to the office of the District Attorney. And the Court does hereby extend its most sincere apologies to the defendant, Fay Allison. And the Court, personally, wishes to congratulate Mr. Perry Mason upon his brilliant handling of this matter."

The gavel banged once more.

"The Court," announced Judge Randolph Jordan, "is adjourned."

Agatha Christie

How Does Your Garden Grow?

All the world loves the pompous Belgian detective of the egg-shaped head, the luxuriant mustache, and the little gray cells—Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot . . . Here is one of his less renowned cases—but one you should not miss.

HERCULE POIROT ARRANGED HIS letters in a neat pile in front of him. He picked up the topmost letter, studied the address for a moment, then neatly slit the back of the envelope with a little paper knife that he kept on the breakfast table for that express purpose and extracted the contents. Inside was yet another envelope, carefully sealed with purple wax and clearly marked *Private and Confidential*.

Hercule Poirot's eyebrows rose a little on his egg-shaped head. He murmured, "*Patience! Nous allons arriver!*" and once more brought the little paper knife into play. This time the envelope yielded a letter written in a rather shaky and spiky handwriting. A few words were underlined.

Hercule Poirot unfolded it and read. The letter was headed once again *Private and Confidential*. On the right-hand side was the address—Rosebank, Charman's Green, Bucks—and the date, March twenty-first.

Dear M. Poirot: I have been rec-

ommended to you by an old and valued friend of mine who knows the *worry* and *distress* I have been in lately. Not that this friend knows the actual circumstances—those I have kept *entirely* to myself—the matter being strictly private. My friend assures me that you are *discretion* itself—and that there will be no fear of my being involved in a *police* matter which, if my suspicions should prove correct, I should *very much dislike*. But it is of course possible that I am *entirely* mistaken. I do not feel myself clear-headed enough nowadays—suffering as I do from insomnia and the result of a severe illness last winter—to investigate things for myself. I have neither the *means* nor the *ability*. On the other hand, I must reiterate that this is a very delicate family matter and that for many reasons I may want the *whole thing hushed up*. If I am once assured of the *facts*, I can deal with the matter myself and should prefer to do so. I hope that I have made myself clear on this point. If you will undertake

this investigation, perhaps you will let me know?

Yours very truly,

AMELIA BARROWBY.

Poirot read the letter through twice. Again his eyebrows rose slightly. Then he placed it on one side and proceeded to the next envelope in the pile.

At 10 o'clock precisely he entered the room where Miss Lemon, his confidential secretary, sat awaiting her instructions for the day. Miss Lemon was 48 and of unprepossessing appearance. Her general effect was that of a lot of bones flung together at random. She had a passion for order almost equaling that of Poirot himself; and though capable of thinking, she never thought unless told to do so.

Poirot handed her the morning correspondence. "Have the goodness, mademoiselle, to write refusals couched in correct terms to all of these."

Miss Lemon ran an eye over the various letters, scribbling a hieroglyphic on each of them. These marks were legible to her alone and were in a code of her own: "soft soap"; "slap in the face"; "purr purr"; "curt"—and so on. Having done this, she nodded and looked up for further instructions.

Poirot handed her Amelia Barrowby's letter. She extracted it from its double envelope, read it through and looked up inquiringly.

"Yes, M. Poirot?" Her pencil hovered—ready—over her short-hand pad.

"What is your opinion of that letter, Miss Lemon?"

With a slight frown Miss Lemon put down the pencil and read through the letter again.

The contents of a letter meant nothing to Miss Lemon except from the point of view of composing an adequate reply. Very occasionally her employer appealed to her human, as opposed to her official, capacities. It slightly annoyed Miss Lemon when he did so—she was very nearly the perfect machine, completely and gloriously uninterested in all human affairs. Her real passion in life was the perfection of a filing system beside which all other filing systems should sink into oblivion. She dreamed of such a system at night. Nevertheless, Miss Lemon was perfectly capable of intelligence on purely human matters, as Hercule Poirot well knew.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Old lady," said Miss Lemon. "Got the wind up pretty badly."

"Ah! The wind rises in her, you think?"

Miss Lemon, who considered that Poirot had been long enough in Great Britain to understand its slang terms, did not reply. She took a brief look at the double envelope.

"Very hush-hush," she said. "And tells you nothing at all."

"Yes, I observed that."

Miss Lemon's hand hung once more hopefully over the shorthand pad. This time Hercule Poirot responded.

"Tell her I will do myself the honor to call upon her at any time she suggests, unless she prefers to consult me here. Do not type the letter—write it by hand."

"Yes, M. Poirot."

Poirot produced more correspondence. "These are bills."

Miss Lemon's efficient hands sorted them quickly. "I'll pay all but these two."

"Why those two? There is no error in them."

"They are firms you've only just begun to deal with. It looks bad to pay too promptly when you've just opened an account—looks as though you were working up to get some credit later on."

"Ah!" murmured Poirot. "I bow to your superior knowledge of the British tradesman."

"There's nothing much I don't know about them," said Miss Lemon grimly.

The letter to Miss Amelia Barrowby was duly written and sent, but no reply was forthcoming. Perhaps, thought Hercule Poirot, the old lady had unraveled the mystery herself. Yet he felt a shade of surprise that in that case she should not have written a courteous word to say that his services were no longer required.

It was five days later when Miss

Lemon, after receiving her morning's instructions, said, "That Miss Barrowby we wrote to—no wonder there's been no answer. She dead."

Hercule Poirot said very softly, "Ah—dead." It sounded not so much like a question as an answer.

Opening her handbag, Miss Lemon produced a newspaper clipping. "I saw it in the tube and tore it out."

Just registering in his mind approval of the fact that, though Miss Lemon used the word "tore," she had neatly cut the entry out with scissors, Poirot read the announcement taken from the Births, Deaths, and Marriages in the *Morning Post*: "On March 26th—suddenly—at Rosebank, Charman's Green, Amelia Jane Barrowby, in her seventy-third year. No flowers, by request."

Poirot read it over. He murmured under his breath, "Suddenly." Then he said briskly, "If you will be so obliging as to take a letter?"

The pencil hovered. Miss Lemon, her mind dwelling on the intricacies of the filing system, took down in rapid and correct shorthand:

Dear Miss Barrowby: I have received no reply from you, but as I shall be in the neighborhood of Charman's Green on Friday, I will call upon you on that day and discuss more fully the matter you

mentioned to me in your letter.

Yours, etc.

"Type this letter, please; and if it is posted at once, it should get to Charman's Green tonight."

On the following morning a letter in a black-edged envelope arrived by the second post:

Dear Sir: In reply to your letter my aunt, Miss Barrowby, passed away on the twenty-sixth, so the matter you speak of is no longer of importance.

Yours truly,

MARY DELAFONTAINE.

Poirot smiled to himself. "No longer of importance . . . Ah—that is what we shall see. *En avant*—to Charman's Green."

Rosebank was a house that seemed likely to live up to its name, which is more than can be said for most English houses of its class and character.

Hercule Poirot paused as he walked up the path to the front door and looked approvingly at the neatly planned beds on either side of him. Rose bushes that promised a good harvest later in the year, and at present daffodils, early tulips, blue hyacinths. The last bed was partly edged with oyster shells.

Poirot murmured to himself, "How does it go, the English rhyme the children sing?

*Mistress Mary, quite contrary,
How does your garden grow?
With cockle-shells, and silver
bells,
And pretty maids all in a row.*

"Not a row, perhaps," he considered, "but here is at least one pretty maid to make the little rhyme come right."

The front door had opened and a neat little maid in cap and apron was looking somewhat dubiously at the spectacle of a heavily mustached foreign gentleman talking aloud to himself in the front garden. She was, as Poirot had noted, a very pretty little maid, with round blue eyes and rosy cheeks.

Poirot raised his hat with courtesy and addressed her: "Pardon, but does a Miss Amelia Barrowby live here?"

The little maid gasped and her eyes grew rounder. "Oh, sir, didn't you know? She's dead. Ever so sudden it was. Tuesday night."

She hesitated, divided between two strong instincts: the first, distrust of a foreigner; the second, the pleasurable enjoyment of her class in dwelling on the subject of illness and death.

"You amaze me," said Hercule Poirot, not very truthfully. "I had an appointment with the lady for today. However, I can perhaps see the other lady who lives here."

The little maid seemed slightly doubtful. "The mistress? Well, you could see her, perhaps, but I don't

know whether she'll be seeing anyone or not."

"She will see me," said Poirot, and handed her a card.

The authority of his tone had its effect. The rosy-cheeked maid fell back and ushered Poirot into a sitting room on the right of the hall. Then, card in hand, she departed to summon her mistress.

Hercule Poirot looked around him. The room was a perfectly conventional drawing room—oatmeal-colored paper with a frieze round the top, rose-colored cushions and curtains, a good many china knickknacks and ornaments. There was nothing in the room that stood out, that announced a definite personality.

Suddenly Poirot, who was very sensitive, felt eyes watching him. He wheeled round. A girl was standing in the entrance of the French window—a small, sallow girl, with very black hair and suspicious eyes.

She came in, and as Poirot made a little bow she burst out abruptly, "Why have you come?"

Poirot did not reply. He merely raised his eyebrows.

"You are not a lawyer—no?" Her English was good, but not for a minute would anyone have taken her to be English.

"Why should I be a lawyer, mademoiselle?"

The girl stared at him sullenly. "I thought you might be. I thought you had come perhaps to say that

she did not know what she was doing. I have heard of such things—the not due influence; that is what they call it no? But that is not right. She wanted me to have the money, and I shall have it. If it is needful I shall have a lawyer of my own. The money is mine. She wrote it down so, and so it shall be." She looked ugly, her chin thrust out, her eyes gleaming.

The door opened and a tall woman entered and said, "Katrina."

The girl shrank, flushed, muttered something, and went out through the French window.

Poirot turned to face the newcomer who had so effectually dealt with the situation by uttering a single word. There had been authority in her voice, and contempt and a shade of well-bred irony. He realized at once that this was the owner of the house, Mary Delafontaine.

"M. Poirot? I wrote to you. You cannot have received my letter."

"I have been away from London."

"Oh, I see; that explains it. I must introduce myself. My name is Delafontaine. This is my husband. Miss Barrowby was my aunt."

Mr. Delafontaine had entered so quietly that his arrival had passed unnoticed. He was a tall man with grizzled hair and an indeterminate manner. He had a nervous way of fingering his chin. He looked often toward his wife, and it was plain that he expected her to take the lead in any conversation.

"I much regret that I intrude in the midst of your bereavement," said Hercule Poirot.

"I realize that it is not your fault," said Mrs. Delafontaine. "My aunt died on Tuesday evening. It was quite unexpected."

"Most unexpected," said Mr. Delafontaine. "Great blow." His eyes watched the window where the foreign girl had disappeared.

"I apologize," said Hercule Poirot. "And I withdraw." He moved a step toward the door.

"Half a sec," said Mr. Delafontaine. "You—er—had an appointment with Aunt Amelia, you say?"

"Parfaitement."

"Perhaps you will tell us about it," said his wife. "If there is anything we can do—"

"It was of a private nature," said Poirot. "I am a detective," he added.

Mr. Delafontaine knocked over a little china figure he was handling. His wife looked puzzled.

"A detective? And you had an appointment with auntie? But how extraordinary!" She stared at him. "Can't you tell us a little more, M. Poirot? It—it seems quite fantastic."

Poirot was silent for a moment. He chose his words with care.

"It is difficult for me, madame, to know what to do."

"Look here," said Mr. Delafontaine. "She didn't mention Russians, did she?"

"Russians?"

"Yes, you know—Reds, all that sort of thing."

"Don't be absurd, Henry," said his wife.

Mr. Delafontaine collapsed. "Sorry—sorry—I just wondered."

Mary Delafontaine looked frankly at Poirot. Her eyes were very blue, the color of forget-me-nots. "If you can tell us anything, M. Poirot, I should be glad if you would do so. I can assure you that I have a—a reason for asking."

Mr. Delafontaine looked alarmed. "Be careful, old girl—you know there may be nothing in it."

Again his wife quelled him with a glance. "Well, M. Poirot?"

Slowly, gravely, Hercule Poirot shook his head. He shook it with visible regret, but he shook it. "At present, madame," he said, "I fear I must say nothing."

He bowed, picked up his hat, and moved to the door. Mary Delafontaine came with him into the hall. On the doorstep he paused and looked at her.

"You are fond of your garden, I think, madame?"

"I? Yes, I spend a lot of time gardening."

"Je vous fait mes compliments."

He bowed once more and strode down to the gate. As he passed through it and turned to the right, he glanced back and registered two impressions—a sallow face watching him from a first-floor window, and a man of erect and

soldierly carriage pacing up and down on the opposite side of the street.

Hercule Poirot nodded to himself. "*Définitivement*," he said. "There is a mouse in this hole! What move must the cat make now?"

His decision took him to the nearest post office. Here he put through a couple of telephone calls. The result seemed to be satisfactory. He bent his steps to Charman's Green police station, where he inquired for Inspector Sims.

Inspector Sims was a big, burly man with a hearty manner. "M. Poirot?" he inquired. "I thought so. I've just this minute had a telephone call through from the chief constable about you. He said you'd be dropping in. Come into my office."

The door shut, the Inspector waved Poirot to one chair, and settled himself in another.

"You're very quick onto the mark, M. Poirot. Come to see us about this Rosebank case almost before we know it is a case. What put you onto it?"

Poirot drew out the letter he had received and handed it to the Inspector.

"Interesting," he said. "The trouble is, it might mean so many things. Pity she couldn't have been a little more explicit. It would have helped us now."

"Or there might have been no need for help."

"You mean?"

"She might have been alive."

"You go as far as that, do you? H'm—I'm not sure you're wrong."

"I pray of you, Inspector, recount to me the facts. I know nothing at all."

"That's easily done. Old lady was taken bad after dinner on Tuesday night. Very alarming. Convulsions — spasms — whatnot. They sent for the doctor. By the time he arrived she was dead. Idea was she'd died of a fit. Well, he didn't much like the look of things. He hemmed and hawed, but he made it clear that he couldn't give a death certificate. And as far as the family go, that's where the matter stands. They're awaiting the result of the post-mortem. We've got a bit farther. The doctor gave us the tip right away—he and the police surgeon did the autopsy together—and the result is in no doubt whatever. The old lady died of a large dose of strychnine."

"Aha!"

"That's right. Very nasty bit of work. Point is, who gave it to her? It must have been administered very shortly before death. First idea was it was given to her in her food at dinner—but, frankly, that seems to be a washout. They had artichoke soup, served from a tureen, fish pie, and apple tart."

"They' being?"

"Miss Barrowby, Mr. Delafontaine and Mrs. Delafontaine. Miss Barrowby had a kind of nurse-at-

tendant—a half-Russian girl—but she didn't eat with the family. She had the remains as they came out from the dining room. There's a maid, but it was her night out. She left the soup on the stove and the fish pie in the oven, and the apple tart was cold. All three of them ate the same thing—and, apart from that, I don't think you could get strychnine down anyone's throat that way. Stuff's as bitter as gall. The doctor told me you could taste it in a solution of one in a thousand, or something like that."

"Coffee?"

"Coffee's more like it, but the old lady never took coffee."

"I see your point. Yes, it seems an insuperable difficulty. What did she drink at the meal?"

"Water."

"Worse and worse."

"Bit of a teaser, isn't it?"

"She had money, the old lady?"

"Very well to do, I imagine. Of course, we haven't got exact details yet. The Delafontaines are pretty badly off, from what I can make out. The old lady helped with the upkeep of the house."

Poirot smiled a little. He said, "So you suspect the Delafontaines. Which of them?"

"I don't exactly say I suspect either of them in particular. But there it is; they're her only near relations, and her death brings them a tidy sum of money, I've no doubt. We all know what human nature is!"

"Sometimes inhuman—yes, that is very true. And there was nothing else the old lady ate or drank?"

"Well, as a matter of fact—"

"Ah, *voilà!* I felt that you had something, as you say, up your sleeve—the soup, the fish pie, the apple tart—a *bêtise!* Now we come to the hub of the affair."

"I don't know about that. But as a matter of fact, the old girl took a cachet before meals. You know, not a pill or a tablet; one of those rice-paper things with a powder inside. Some perfectly harmless thing for the digestion."

"Admirable. Nothing is easier than to fill a cachet with strychnine and substitute it for one of the others. It slips down the throat with a drink of water and is not tasted."

"That's all right. The trouble is, the girl gave it to her."

"The Russian girl?"

"Yes. Katrina Rieger. She was a kind of lady-help, nurse-companion to Miss Barrōby. Fairly ordered about by her, too, I gather. Fetch this, fetch that, fetch the other, rub my back, pour out my medicine, run round to the chemist—all that sort of business. You know how it is with these old women—they mean to be kind, but what they need is a sort of slave!"

Poirot smiled.

"And there you are, you see," continued Inspector Sims. "It doesn't fit in what you might call nicely. Why should the girl poison

her? Miss Barrowby dies and now the girl will be out of a job, and jobs aren't so easy to find—she's not trained or anything."

"Still," suggested Poirot, "if the box of cachets was left about, anyone in the house might have the opportunity."

"Naturally we're onto that, M. Poirot. I don't mind telling you we're making out inquiries—quiet like, if you understand me. When the prescription was last made up, where it was usually kept; patience and a lot of spade work—that's what will do the trick in the end. And then there's Miss Barrowby's solicitor. I'm having an interview with him tomorrow. And the bank manager. There's a lot to be done."

Poirot rose. "A little favor, Inspector Sims. You will send me a little word how the affair marches? I would esteem it a great favor. Here is my telephone number."

"Why, certainly, M. Poirot. Two heads are better than one; and, besides, you ought to be in on this, having had that letter and all."

"You are too amiable, Inspector." Politely, Poirot shook hands and took his leave.

He was called to the telephone on the following afternoon. "Is that M. Poirot? Inspector Sims here. Things are beginning to sit up and look pretty in that little matter you and I know of."

"In verity? Tell me, I pray of you."

"Well, here's item No. 1—and a pretty big item. Miss B. left a small legacy to her niece and everything else to K. In consideration of her great kindness and attention—that's the way it was put. That alters the complexion of things."

A picture rose swiftly in Poirot's mind. A sullen face and a passionate voice saying, "The money is mine. She wrote it down so, and so it shall be." The legacy would not come as a surprise to Katrina—she knew about it beforehand.

"Item No. 2," continued the voice of Inspector Sims. "Nobody but K. handled that cachet."

"You can be sure of that?"

"The girl herself doesn't deny it. What do you think of that?"

"Extremely interesting."

"We only want one thing more—evidence of how the strychnine came into her possession. That oughtn't to be difficult."

"But so far you haven't been successful?"

"I've barely started. The inquest was only this morning."

"What happened at it?"

"Adjourned for a week."

"And the young lady—K.?"

"I'm detaining her on suspicion. Don't want to run any risks. She might have some friends in the country who'd try to get her out of it."

"No," said Poirot. "I do not think she has any friends."

"Really? What makes you say that, M. Poirot?"

"It is just an idea of mine. There were no other 'items,' as you call them?"

"Nothing that's strictly relevant. Miss B. seems to have been monkeying about a bit with her shares lately—must have dropped quite a tidy sum. It's rather a funny business, one way and another, but I don't see how it affects the main issue—not at present, that is."

"No, perhaps you are right. Well, my best thanks to you. It was most amiable of you to ring me up."

"Not at all. I'm a man of my word. I could see you were interested. Who knows, you may be able to give me a helping hand before the end."

"That would give me a great pleasure. It might help you, for instance, if I could lay my hand on a friend of the girl Katrina."

"I thought you said she hadn't got any friends?" said Inspector Sims, surprised.

"I was wrong," said Hercule Poirot. "She has one."

Before the Inspector could ask a further question, Poirot had rung off.

With a serious face he wandered into the room where Miss Lemon sat at her typewriter. She raised her hands from the keys at her employer's approach and looked at him inquiringly.

"I want you," said Poirot, "to figure to yourself a little history."

Miss Lemon dropped her hands into her lap in a resigned manner.

She enjoyed typing, paying bills, filing papers, and recording appointments. To be asked to imagine herself in hypothetical situations bored her very much, but she accepted it as a disagreeable part of a duty.

"You are a Russian girl," began Poirot.

"Yes," said Miss Lemon, looking intensely British.

"You are alone and friendless in this country. You have reasons for not wishing to return to Russia. You are employed as a kind of drudge, nurse-attendant and companion to an old lady. You are meek and uncomplaining."

"Yes," said Miss Lemon obediently, but entirely failing to see herself being meek to any old lady under the sun.

"The old lady takes a fancy to you. She decided to leave her money to you. She tells you so." Poirot paused.

Miss Lemon said "Yes" again.

"And then the old lady finds out something; perhaps it is a matter of money—she may find that you have not been honest with her. Or it might be more grave still—a medicine that tasted different, some food that disagreed. Anyway, she begins to suspect you of something and she writes to a very famous detective—*enfin*, to the most famous detective—me! I am to call upon her shortly. And then, as you say, the dripping will be in the fire. The great thing is to act quickly. And

so—before the great detective arrives—the old lady is dead. And the money comes to you. . . . Tell me, does that seem reasonable?”

“Quite reasonable,” said Miss Lemon. “Quite reasonable for a Russian, that is. Personally, I should never take a post as a companion. I like my duties clearly defined. And of course I should not dream of murdering anyone.”

Poirot sighed. “How I miss my friend Hastings. He had such an imagination. Such a romantic mind! It is true that he always imagined wrong—but that in itself was a guide.”

Miss Lemon was silent. She had heard about Captain Hastings before, and was not interested. She looked longingly at the typewritten sheet in front of her.

The telephone rang and Miss Lemon went out of the room to answer it. She came back to say, “It’s Inspector Sims again.”

Poirot hurried to the instrument. “‘Allo, ‘allo. What is that you say?”

Sims repeated his statement. “We’ve found a packet of strychnine in the girl’s bedroom—tucked underneath the mattress. The sergeant’s just come in with the news. That about clinches it, I think.”

“Yes,” said Poirot, “I think that clinches it.” His voice had changed. It rang with sudden confidence.

When he had rung off, he sat down at his writing table and arranged the objects on it in a mechanical manner. He murmured to

himself, “There was something wrong. I felt it—no, not felt. It must have been something I saw. *En avant*, the little gray cells. Ponder—reflect. Was everything logical and in order? The girl—her anxiety about the money; Mme. Delafontaine; her husband—his suggestion of Russians—imbecile, but he is an imbecile; the room; the garden—ah! Yes, *the garden*.”

He sat up very stiff. The green light shone in his eyes. He sprang up and went into the adjoining room.

“Miss Lemon, will you have the kindness to leave what you are doing and make an investigation for me?”

“An investigation, M. Poirot? I’m afraid I’m not very good—”

Poirot interrupted her. “You said one day that you knew all about tradesmen.”

“Certainly I do,” said Miss Lemon with confidence.

“Then the matter is simple. You are to go to Charman’s Green and you are to discover a fishmonger.”

“A fishmonger?” asked Miss Lemon, surprised.

“Precisely. The fishmonger who supplied Rosebank with fish. When you have found him you will ask him a certain question.”

He handed her a slip of paper. Miss Lemon took it, noted its contents without interest, then nodded.

“We will go to Charman’s Green together,” said Poirot. “You to the fishmonger and I to the police sta-

tion. It will take us but half an hour from Baker Street."

On arrival at his destination, he was greeted by the surprised Inspector Sims. "Well, this is quick work, M. Poirot. I was talking to you on the phone only an hour ago."

"I have a request to make to you—that you allow me to see this girl Katrina."

"Well, I don't suppose there's any objection to that."

The girl Katrina looked even more sallow and sullen than ever.

Poirot spoke to her very gently. "Mademoiselle, I want you to believe that I am not your enemy. I want you to tell me the truth."

Her eyes snapped defiantly. "I have told the truth. To everyone I have told the truth! If the old lady was poisoned, it was not I who poisoned her. It is all a mistake. You wish to prevent me having the money." Her voice was rasping. She looked, he thought, like a little cornered rat.

"Tell me about this cachet, mademoiselle," M. Poirot went on. "Did no one handle it but you?"

"I have said so, have I not? They were made up at the chemist's that afternoon. I brought them back with me in my bag—that was just before supper. I opened the box and gave Miss Barrowby one with a glass of water."

"No one touched them but you?"

"No." A cornered rat—with courage!

"And Miss Barrowby had for supper only what we have been told. The soup, the fish pie, the tart?"

"Yes." A hopeless "yes"—dark, smoldering eyes that saw no light anywhere.

Poirot patted her shoulder. "Be of good courage, mademoiselle. There may yet be freedom—yes, and money—a life of ease."

She looked at him suspiciously.

As he went out Sims said to him, "I didn't quite get what you said through the telephone—something about the girl having a friend."

"She has one. Me!" said Hercule Poirot, and had left the police station before the Inspector could pull his wits together.

At the Green Cat tearoom, Miss Lemon went straight to the point.

"The man's name is Rudge, in High Street, and you were quite right. A dozen and a half exactly. I've made a note of what he said." She handed it to him.

"Arrr." It was a deep, rich sound like the purr of a cat.

Hercule Poirot betook himself to Rosebank. As he stood in the front garden, the sun setting behind him, Mary Delafontaine came out to him.

"M. Poirot?" Her voice sounded surprised. "You have come back?"

"Yes, I have come back." He paused and then said, "When I first came here, madame, the chil-

dren's nursery rhyme came into my head when I saw your garden:

*Mistress Mary, quite contrary,
How does your garden grow?
With cockle-shells and silver
bells,*

And pretty maids all in a row.
Only they are not *cockle* shells, are they, madame? They are *oyster* shells." His hand pointed.

He heard her catch her breath and then stay very still.

He nodded. "*Mais, oui*, I know! The maid left the dinner ready—she will swear and Katrina will swear that that is all you had. Only you and your husband know that you brought back a dozen and a half oysters—a little treat *pour la bonne tante*. So easy to put the strychnine in an oyster. It is swallowed—*comme ça*! But there remain the shells. They must not go in the bucket—the maid would see them. And so you thought of making an edging of them to a flower bed. But there were not enough—the edging is not complete. The effect is bad—it spoils the symmetry of the otherwise charming garden. Those few oyster shells struck an alien note—they displeased my eye on my first visit."

Mary Delafontaine said, "I suppose you guessed from the letter. I knew she had written—but not how much she'd said."

Poirot answered evasively, "I knew at least that it was a family matter. If it had been a question of Katrina there would have been no

point in hushing things up. I understand that you or your husband handled Miss Barrowby's securities to your own profit, and that she found out—"

Mary Delafontaine nodded. "We've done it for years—a little here and there. I never realized she was sharp enough to find out. And then I learned she had sent for a detective, and I found out, too, that she was leaving her money to Katrina—that miserable creature!"

"And so the strychnine was put in Katrina's bedroom? I comprehend. You save yourself and your husband from what I may discover, and you saddle an innocent child with murder. Had you no pity, madame?"

Mary Delafontaine shrugged her shoulders—her blue forget-me-not eyes looked into Poirot's. He remembered the perfection of her acting the first day he had come and the bungling attempts of her husband. A woman above the average—but inhuman.

She said, "Pity? For that intriguing little rat?" Her contempt rang out.

Hercule Poirot said slowly, "I think, madame, that you have cared in your life for two things only. One is your husband."

He saw her lips tremble.

"And the other—is your garden?"

He looked round him. His glance seemed to apologize to the flowers for that which he had done and was about to do.

Cornell Woolrich

That's Your Own Funeral

A thriller by one of the most dynamic talents in modern crime writing . . . Cornell Woolrich can generate an atmosphere of terror and suspense, usually ending with a whiplash of surprise, out of all the lurks in and around the commonplace.

THE DEMURE LITTLE LADY STEPPED into the grocery store, rested her large parcel on the counter, and stood by to be waited on. Outside a man just passing glanced incuriously in through the glass front of the shop as he went by. Just a brief turn of his head, one quick glance, no more. The only unusual feature about it being that male passersby will glance at haberdasheries, cigar stores, even barber shops, but seldom at groceries as a rule.

She was a pretty little thing, and she gave her order in a low, pleasant, half-shy voice, keeping her eyes on the list in her hand. She looked absurdly like a child, gravely reciting a lesson. But there was a wedding ring on her ungloved hand. So she must have been at least eighteen.

"Want me to send it over for you?" he offered. "Kind of heavy—"

"No, thanks, I'll carry it myself," the little lady murmured. "No trouble at all."

She emerged, her arms pretty full,

and continued on her way. She wore a short sealskin jacket that swung as she walked; her clothes were very plain and inexpensive looking.

The man who had passed the grocery as she'd gone in hadn't progressed very far. He had stopped at the newsstand at the next corner to buy a paper, then he retreated, his back to the line of buildings, to glance through it quickly before taking it home with him. The hands that held the paper wore stained pigskin gloves.

The little lady with the bundles passed him a moment later. Neither of them glanced at the other; there was no reason for them to. He was lost in the baseball scores boxed at the top of the page, she was eying a light diagonally opposite to make sure she could cross on red. Halfway down the next block she stopped in at another store, a bakery.

A moment after, by one of those coincidences that so often happen, Pigskin Gloves passed in front of

the bakery. He was carrying the paper in his pocket now. Once more his eyes strayed indifferently to the inside of the store, then out again. But the average man on the street isn't particularly interested in the interiors of bakeries either. This one may have been thinking of the supper he was going home to—so leisurely.

She accepted her change from the counterman, put it in her purse, and came out more bebundled than ever. Pigskin Gloves, who was obviously in no great hurry to get home, had stopped at last at the proper kind of showcase—that of a men's furnishing store a few doors down—and was gazing in at a luscious display of trick shirts. The window had been recently washed, unlike most of its neighbors; except that it lacked a little quicksilver backing, it was every bit as good as a mirror.

The busy little housewife marched by with her packages; and her watery reflection followed across the glass store front. But just as she came abreast of Pigskin Gloves who was standing there with with his back to her, the pupils of her eyes flicked briefly sideward toward him, then looked away again. It was as instantaneous, as hard to catch, as the click of a camera shutter.

She went a few steps farther. But there was a change coming over her eyes now. Or rather over the skin around them. It was hardening, tensing a little. Instantly, as

though she realized it herself, she relaxed them, and they became as smooth as ever. But she seemed to remember a purchase she had forgotten to make. She stopped, turned abruptly, and began doubling back the way she had just come.

Pigskin Gloves was still idly looking at shirts and ties as she passed behind him a second time. But this time her eyes were blankly unaware of him; there was no flick toward him; and his oblivious back expressed equal unawareness of her.

At the corner that had the traffic light, she didn't cross a second time but turned up the side street and passed from sight, remaining just a demure little figure carrying bundles.

Instantly, from nowhere at all a second man had materialized beside Pigskin Gloves. Pigskin Gloves gave him a quick almost unnoticeable prod in the side, as though urging him forward, and then they separated. No one could have seen it, it was no more than a gesture of recognition between two passing acquaintances. The second man, who was dressed in a gray ulster, a gray soft hat, reached the corner and turned it, taking the same direction as the little housewife. The first one, Pigskin Gloves, was hurrying onward to the corner above, but going much faster now. He took the second side street, parallel to this one.

On the one the little housewife had taken, Gray Hat also was going

along briskly. A discarded bag full of groceries caught his eye, just outside an areaway entrance. An untouched loaf of bread in wax paper had rolled out. He didn't stop to examine it; on the contrary his brisk pace changed to a jog trot. Further along was a second bag of groceries. This one had rolled toward the street and spilled out over the curb. The jog trot became a headlong run, the unfastened gray coat ballooning out behind him like a parachute. The street ahead was empty.

To be accurate, not strictly empty, but there was no little housewife on it. And that was all that Gray Hat was interested in. Down at the corner, crashed open against a fire hydrant, was the third and last brown paper bag. A pair of bright tin cans had rolled out of it; two boys were bearing down on it from across the way, frantically urged on by a plump maternal figure in an open upper story window.

As Gray Hat, by one of those coincidences that were now becoming a little overworked, reached the corner, Pigskin Gloves was coming at a full run toward him, having rounded the block from the other side. They both turned and followed a single direction.

They went one more block east, then one south. It was incredible how the girl had managed to get so far so quickly. Just beyond the next corner the demure little housewife, packageless now, and hatless, was

careening along at a frantic, lurching speed, hugging her arms to her body as most women do when they run. That she could get anywhere at all on such spindly heels, much less as far and as fast as she had showed to what limits the human mechanism can force itself.

Halfway down, a doorway seemed suddenly to engulf her, and she was gone. The white and violet crepe ribbons fastened there fluttered with her passing. Long after she was gone, the glass street door was still slowly jolting back into place on reluctant hinges.

Just too late to catch sight of her, Pigskin Gloves and Gray Hat turned into the block, raced to the next corner. But they didn't turn it. An elderly man, standing there, approached at their command and said something to them. He made an abortive gesture with his arm, as though to point, and one of them slapped it down. Once again, as they had before, they separated. Gray Hat stayed where he was, pulling his hat brim further down over his eyes. Pigskin Gloves hurried off toward a very little thing, an almost inconspicuous little thing that he had spotted a second before. A blue and white enamel disk affixed to the baseboard of a store window that said *Public Telephone*.

Twilight was deepening into night; the street lights suddenly came on in long serried rows as far as the eye could reach. . . .

On the second floor of the hall-

way the demure-faced girl was leaning breathlessly against a door, limp as a rag doll, not making any sound, her face pressed flat against the wood to still the gasping of her breath. Her hands roamed up and down it on each side of her, not knocking but pushing against it, incoherently seeking admittance. She turned just once to look fearfully at the stairs, then pressed despairingly flat against the door again. It opened without a sound; she vanished like a shadow; the door closed again.

On the other side of it, in the orange dimness of a single bulb from far down the long hall, she spoke. A steamy whisper, with no larynx sound at all. "Feds, Champ! Whiskers' boys, Champ! Right on top of me, almost, before I knew it!" She passed the flat of her hand across her brow, staggered a little from so much running.

The man in the blue shirt finished putting away the blue-black automatic and interlacing the door-seam with chains, as though he hadn't heard her. Then they moved down the long hallway together, away from the door. In the room at the end he flexed his arm just once, and she was down suddenly on one supporting arm.

"And you came back here! Right straight back, like in a paper chasel!" He reached up and turned the bulb out, went over to the blank wall opposite, and from there diagonally up to the windows. Spider-webby

net curtains criss-crossed the silvery arc-light glow coming in from the street. He didn't touch them, didn't even let his breath disturb them, as he pushed his face close up against them. Champ Lane, in the dim light, looked a good deal like a kid. His hard, cunning face was obscured; his body in silhouette was small, almost stunted; its movements wiry and tense.

"I made it, Champ, I lost them." Her voice sounded muffled somewhere in the darkened room behind him. "I had to get in out of the open, I had to pull a hole over my head, and I didn't know which way to turn. If I'd stayed out I'd have been picked up sure as—"

"Why didn't you pull the river over you, then?" he said bitterly, eyes glinting through two intersections in the closely webbed net.

She picked herself up, swung open a closet door, stepped behind it—outside the closet but away from the windows. Sandpaper hissed once, there was a momentary match-glow, then darkness again. She came out from behind the door with her hand turned down and under over a winking red spark. "I lost all the grub too. I don't know what we're going to do, I can't show my face in those same stores again. My seal coat's hot, too, and it's the only thing I've got to go out in—"

The red spark moved restlessly back and forth in the velvety darkness of the room. In the silence as she stopped whispering, a muffled

wail, an eerie piping sound, came thinly through the ceiling over them.

She shivered. "They still got that stiff up there with them?" she said querulously, tilting her head back. "Why don't they take it out? It drives you wacky listening to them."

The man at the window, Champion Lane, wanted by almost the whole nation these last few weeks, hadn't stirred, hadn't taken his eyes from the two net pinholes that served each pupil as a frame. He hadn't seemed to breathe all this time. He spoke again at last:

"You lost 'em!" was all he said, in a clipped, choked voice.

Instantly, without a sound, she was at his shoulder, peering over it down into the street. The red spark in the hollow of her hand was hidden from the window by her palm. He didn't hit her any more, just dug abruptly back with his elbow. She went away, came back again without the glowing cigarette.

Three men were gathered into a tight little knot on the opposite side of the street; they weren't looking over this way at all. They melted apart, each went up a different brownstone stoop. One wore a cravenette waterproof coat. One carried a violin case tucked high up under the pit of his arm. No doors opened to admit them at the tops of those stoops, they just ebbed into the shadows. There were some uniformed policemen, too.

"Warm, weather on its way," Champ said grimly.

She pulled at his sleeve. "Let's get out. Maybe we still can make it. This is an awful set-up to be caught in—a dead end without any turns!"

"It's too late, you fool, it's too late. We've got the whole District of Columbia on our hands."

A fellow and his girl were coming up the street arm in arm from the lower corner. A man suddenly accosted them from an areaway, dropped back again. The couple turned, went hastily back the way they had come, turning their heads to look over their shoulders.

"Roping us off, eh?"

"The back yard, Champ. We can get out that way."

"If they're on this street, they're on the next one over." He turned briefly away, shrugged into a suit coat. Instantly the ghostly blue of his shirt darkened to invisible black. He took the gun out again from under it. "They're not getting me alive," he said quietly.

The futile bleating coming down through the ceiling sounded weirder than ever in the tense prickling stillness; it was like the monotonous fluting tune an Indian snake charmer plays, or the whistle of a peanut stand on a lonely street corner.

Champ Lane had always had a sense of humor; perverted, perhaps, but it was there. His eyes flicked upward. "Move over, whoever you are," he chuckled, "there's two more coming up!"

The girl in the room with him winced, drew in her breath sharply, as though something sharp had cut her.

Out in the street a taxi halted, was reversing with difficulty. A directing figure jumped off the running board as it started back the wrong way on a one-way street. Lights were going out by the roomful in houses opposite. They became strangely blank, inscrutable. A woman came hurrying out of one of them guided by a policeman, a birdcage in her hand. He gave her a parting shove at the elbow and she went waddling down the street to safety.

"Any minute now," said Champ Lane, showing his teeth in what might have been a grin.

Suddenly the mourners' lament above broke off short, razor-clean. The waspish buzzing of a door-bell battery, clearly audible through the paper-thin floor, took its place. Z-z-z-z. Footsteps hurried to and fro across the planking up there, scuffled briefly as though someone were being forced to leave against his will.

Then, incredibly, it sounded right there in the same flat with them—louder, as angry as a stirred-up hornet's nest at the other end of the long hall.

"What do they expect me to do?" he said, "Walk down to the door with my hands up? Take it," he instructed her briefly, "or else they'll know for sure which flat—"

She moved down the hall on soundless feet. "Yes?" she breathed into the perforated disk on the wall.

"Everybody out! Everybody down to the street! That's a Department of Justice order!"

She came back. "They're clearing the house."

"Gas, that means," he said.

"Champ," she pleaded hoarsely, "don't just stay in here with your back to the wall and die! Don't count on your arsenal in the kitchen, you've got a whole Government against you! The minutes are going, once they've emptied the other flats it'll be too late—"

An incessant throbbing of feet was sounding from the galvanized iron framework of the staircase outside—all going one way—all going down. It was vibration rather than sound. The warning buzz kept sounding distantly as doors opened. Below, above, somewhere on the same floor. The thin, keening sound suddenly burst into full volume again, but it wasn't overhead any more, it was going down and around the stairwell, ebbing to the street below.

Champ surged forward swiftly.

He was at the window again. A bowed figure in widow's weeds, face veiled, was being hurried on reluctant feet across to the other side of the street, a policeman on one side of her, the building superintendent on the other, holding her up.

She, Champ's wife, must have

been at the door without his knowing it; he would probably have shot her down if he had. She came running back. "The roof, Champ, the roof."

"Whaddya think they are—hicks?" was all he said, not turning his head.

"Then do your dying out in the open hall at least, not sealed up in this sardine can! The stairs're still clear from this floor up. Let's give it a try, at least. We can always beat it down in again, if it's no go—" She was pulling at his left arm with both of hers.

"All right," he said suddenly, "get started, up there. I'm going to begin it from here. It's coming anyway—and I never yet fired second in my life. Here goes your friend with the raincoat."

She could just about make out the figure, across his shoulder and through the curtains and the window glass, up on top of a stoop there on the other side, signaling to someone unseen on this side.

He didn't touch the curtain or the pane. "Watch your eyes." She squinted them protectingly. It went off like a cannon, the flash lighting up both their faces, and bits of glass spattered all over them like raindrops. The curtain quivered violently; a singed hole was in it now. The figure on the stoop took a nose dive down the whole twenty brownstone steps, rolled all the way across the sidewalk into the gutter.

Instantly a whole unguessed in-

sect world came to life. Swarms of yellow butterflies fluttered from every araway, from every stoop, all up and down the street. Whole hivefuls of angry bees seemed to loose themselves against both windows, and hop around inside the room like Mexican jumping-beans. In an instant there wasn't a shred of glass left in either frame. Champ jerked back, cursing, and threw himself flat on his belly pulling her down with him. The curtains were doing a buck-and-wing. Wisps of smoke came from the roof line across the way and floated off into the night sky. A searchlight beam suddenly shot down from somewhere, found the range of the windows, and bleached the room inside talcum-white.

They were both flat on their stomachs, wriggling snake-like for the safety of the hall, the girl in the lead. Champ swung bodily around his gun, like a rudder steering a floundering boat, ducked his chin to the carpet, and shot *up* the beam to a cornice across the street. Glass fluted plaintively, the white-hot whorl that centered the beam went yellow, then red, then out. The beam itself snuffed out, like an erased white line. They couldn't see anything themselves for a minute, much less the others over there around it.

He felt his way after her, hand on her upright heel; then they both reared behind the hall wall. "C'mon," he said, "we're good for ten

minutes yet, after that. They probably think Frankie or somebody else is in here with me."

A window in the hallway looking out on a shaft that led to the back shivered to pieces just after they'd gone by, their flitting forms must have silhouetted against the light-toned wall behind them.

"Tomcats out on the back fence too," he gritted. He pitched his gun into the kitchen, grabbed up an unspiked one from a china cabinet where they were hanging from hooks like cups. The place was a regular munitions depot. At the door he took the lead, slithered out to the turn of the stairs, peered down to the floor below. She took the branch leading up.

"Champ, don't!" she breathed. "Isn't the rap tough enough as it is?"

His gun blasted just once, malevolently, and thick door-glass jumped apart somewhere below. A swarm of bees winged up to the second floor with a noise like a coffee grinder; and the smooth wall broke out with blackheads. But he was already on his way up to the third at her heels. "Tommy gun," he said. "All they need is tin hats and a flag!"

They shot out around the third landing; past a door with a wreath, and on up to the fourth. The house was all theirs. Below it sounded like a very enthusiastic Fourth of July. On the fourth floor somebody had lost a supper-table napkin in

his hurry to get out, probably from under his chin. An overlooked radio was still jabbering away:

"And then little Peter Rabbit said to the Big Bad Wolf—"

Above the fourth the stairs shed their fake marble trim, took on a sharper incline. A roof door sealed them. "Get that hall light!" he ordered, hand on the latch. She high jumped, and couldn't reach it.

"All right, skip it." He sighted on it almost casually and it popped into nothingness like a little balloon.

He motioned her down behind him, took off the latch, and began to ease the roof door out with shoulder pressure. Instantly, as though it were high noon out instead of well into the night, the gap was fuming with radiance like a seidnitz powder from some waiting beam, and the usual bees were singing all over the outside of the metal door. One of them, getting in, ricocheted directly across the girl's feet on one of the lower steps, like some kind of a warm little bug. She shook it off with a kick.

"Musta mobilized the militia," he said with a flash of sardonic humor. They started down again, on the bias, hugging the inside wall away from the stair rail. Out in the street somewhere a futile bombardment—at nothing—was in full blast. They got down to the third again unopposed. Champ's wife had picked up the discarded napkin, perhaps with some unspoken wish that he'd surrender alive, and was

holding it balled in her hand without his seeing it. They re-passed the door with the crêpe, hurriedly left on an inch-wide gap by its routed tenants.

He stopped, wavering by the stairs. Her hand pressed against his arm. "Oh." It was a small sound—a little, throaty gasp. "Oh—you're hurt—bleeding—"

"It's nothing," he said shortly. "It was that first blast—here, gimme that napkin." He grabbed it from her, wrapped it around his upper arm just below the biceps, held the ends for her to tie.

"I won't leave you, Champ. I won't. You're hurt."

"You'll do like I tell you. I'm all right. Stop snivelin' over me. It's just a little blood." He pushed her away from him, mounted the first steps, then stopped short. "You know what I'm going to do, don't you?" he said.

She looked frightened—in a new way. "I—I guess so, Champ," she said, and shivered.

His eyes were hard, commanding.

"Then here's what it's up to you to do—" He told her rapidly, in short, sharp phrases. "Don't worry," he said, finishing. "And as soon as you get a chance get in touch with Eddie. I'll leave a message, see? So just sit tight. Now go ahead—" He pushed her from him.

She crept fearfully down a flight further, to the second—alone. Upstairs in the depths of the building

somewhere Champ was firing his gun again—into wood, at close range, it sounded like. It was drowned out in the repeated thud and boom of gas grenades coming in now through the windows of the second floor flat.

She came wavering down to the vestibule through the haze of the gas, her hand pressed to her stinging eyes. They led her out to the street, and the barrage against the windows died down shamefacedly. Up at either end were roped-off black masses that were spectators, here in the middle a big bald patch of empty sidewalk and roadway, like a setting for a stage play.

She came out into the middle of this with a knot of men around her—so very fragile and girlish, she looked, to be the cause of so much racket and commotion. She mayn't have been crying, but the gas made it seem as if she was. "Where is he?" she was asked.

"He got out right at the start," she said simply. "He must have slipped right through your fingers along with the others. I couldn't do it, because you'd already seen me this afternoon—" And she gave them a rueful little smile.

They rushed the flat—and got a kitchenful of assorted weapons for their trouble.

"Rigged himself up and put one over on us, huh?" someone in command said wrathfully. "I told you to check those tenants carefully when you cleared the house!"

"We did, but the extras all accounted for themselves as guests from a party they were having on the top floor, and mourners from a wake on the third—"

"Sure! But you didn't check them *with* each other, you let them come out in any old order, and didn't keep any of them in custody after they did. This ain't the last you're going to hear about this, McDowell!"

The building was searched from top to bottom, but the girl seemed to have told the truth. Once again as so many times before, Champ Lane had eluded capture by a hair's breadth. They had the net to set all over again. At least this time they had his wife, whatever good that did them.

The other tenants were allowed to return to their homes, and she was taken to the local headquarters of the Bureau of Investigation for questioning. A questioning that continued relentlessly all the rest of the night and well into the morning of the next day. Without any other brutality, however, than its length.

The girl was able to satisfy them that she had not known who Champ was, or at least that he was a wanted criminal, when she had married him less than three weeks before. The similarity of names between her husband and the outlaw she had ascribed at the time to mere coincidence; Lane was not the most uncommon name there was, after all. Even the nickname Champ itself

she had mistakenly thought had been given him in joking reference to the wanted man and not because he himself was the original. He had not, and they knew that as well as she, committed any overt act during those past three weeks, they had been hiding out.

"But then if you didn't know, how is it you ran for your life from a couple of our agents this afternoon?"

She did know by then, she admitted; she had found out meantime—from the collection of weapons in the kitchen; his resemblance to pictures of the real Lane she had seen. She had intended leaving him at the first opportunity, but he had watched her too closely until now. She had wanted to avoid capture this afternoon, however, for fear she would be forced to reveal his hiding place. He might think she had intentionally betrayed him, and then she would be in danger of her life night and day; he was the kind would have tracked her down remorselessly and paid her back.

It all sounded convincing as she told it. She was calm, and in her answers was the composure of one who has a clear conscience. She wasn't defiant or intractable, but submissive, resigned. Just a little lady who had let her heart lead her head into trouble, that was all; one who was no criminal herself. If they were aware of the one glaring discrepancy between her story and

the facts—namely, the two shots, one from the window and one from the stairs, that had been fired *after* the building was emptied—they gave no sign. It was not to her interest to remind them of that. Even though the man in the waterproof coat had not been killed, she knew the penalty for taking up arms against a government agent. And if Champ had made good his escape, as she claimed, then it must have been she who had fired those shots.

But as the night wore out into wan daylight, and that in turn brightened into full morning, a change began to come over her. It may have been that the strain of the protracted questioning was beginning to tell on her. At any rate, her composure began to slip away from her little by little. At six-thirty she was fidgety, at seven-thirty noticeably nervous and strained, by eight-thirty harried, distracted. They even sent out for a cup of coffee for her, to see if that would brace her up a little, restore her some—but it seemed to have no effect.

As the city outside stirred, awoke to the new day, and went about its business, she began to verge almost on collapse. As butchers, barbers, bakers, elevator operators, bus conductors, street cleaners, bootblacks, newspaper vendors—and pallbearers—took up their daily tasks she commenced to beg them:

"Oh, please let me go! I can't stand any more of this! *Please* let me

go! I haven't done anything! I tell you I don't know where he went!" Her distress became almost unendurable; she couldn't even sit still on her chair any longer; her fidgeting hands plucked her handkerchief into threads. It was obvious that unless they dismissed her soon they were going to have a first-class case of hysteria on their hands.

After holding what seemed to her like an endless conference in an adjoining room, they sent out word that she would be released on her own recognizance. She was, of course, to hold herself at their disposal for further questioning at any time. If she tried to leave town, she would be arrested.

It was now ten minutes past nine. She fled downstairs to the street like one possessed. She must have sensed that their object in suddenly letting her go was in the hope that she would eventually lead them to Champ Lane.

So she was careful—very careful—even in her frantic haste. She dodged, apparently aimlessly, through the stream of pedestrians, darted into a large department store, dashed down into the basement and left the store by a side-street entrance. Then she plunged across the street and entered a small and grimy but quite respectable hotel.

She had to call Eddie—right away. If she used the pay booth in the lobby, someone might overhear her. She wasn't sure that she'd actually lost whoever might be trailing

her. So she went into the ladies washroom and used the telephone there.

In a minute, Eddie's low-pitched voice came to her over the wire. She identified herself. "What about—him, Eddie? Is he all right? Where is he?"

"Hold it, sister. I haven't heard a thing."

"But he said—Eddie, he said he'd call you." Her voice rose as panic stirred through her; her fingers squeezed around the mouthpiece of the phone until they ached.

"Look. Don't come over here. Call me later. I'll let you know if I hear anything . . ."

"But, Eddie, *something* must have—" The phone clicked in her ear, and to no one in particular she said, loudly, shrilly, "His arm—the bleeding—dear God, *no!*"

When she was on the street again, she was a woman gone mad. Her face was all pulled apart—the mouth wrenched open, eyes wide and staring. She forgot that someone might be following her, she forgot to be careful, she forgot everything but Champ—and his arm—and the blood—and where he was, lying unconscious, maybe dead, in that awful place. . . .

She waved to a taxi, jumped in with a swift, sprawling movement, and gave the driver the address of the house she'd left the night before.

The crêpe was still affixed to the front door, and but for the two

yawning second-floor windows, and some strips of tape holding the glass in place in the street door, there was nothing to witness last night's battle. The superintendent was sweeping up glass shards from the sidewalk as she got out of the cab and accosted him with a strained face.

"I came back to get my things," she said, staring at him with a peculiar fixed tensivity.

He glowered at her over his shoulder. "The quicker the better!" He spat, virtuously if inaccurately. "Go on up, help yourself. Fine people to have living in a respectable house!"

She couldn't seem to tear herself away, though. She kept looking from him to the crêpe and from the crêpe to him. Her eyes strayed up the bullet-pitted façade of the building—stopped a little higher than the second floor, where the blinds were drawn down full length.

"What time," she asked as casually as she could, "are they having their funeral?"

"Yah, *you* should ask!" he growled resentfully. "Fine funeral you and that loafer husband of yours give 'em!" And then as she hovered there in the middle of all his glass-sweepings, he went on, "It's all over with long ago. Eight o'clock sharp they come by and screw down the lid. Eight-thirty already they left the house! He's under the ground at Evergreen Cemetery by now, poor man, and may his soul rest in peace—"

Something that sounded like the twang of a snapping violin string fell on his ears, and when he looked, his carefully collected glass-sweepings were scattered all over the sidewalk again.

She got the door of the taxi open and fell in. She didn't climb in, she *fell* in on her face. The driver heard a choked sound that he translated as "Evergreen Cemetery," and acted upon it. Her legs were still sticking out through the open door as the cab veered off.

Down at the lower corner, by one of those coincidences that were happening again, there was another cab drawn up at the curb with three men in it. She had managed to get up on her knees by the time her machine flashed by. She screamed out at them through the open window, "For God's sake, follow me—if you're Feds!" Which was a strange invitation to come from Champ Lane's wife. Her outthrust arm, beckoning them on wind-mill-fashion, continued to wave frantically out the window for blocks down.

"Quit it, lady!" warned the driver at one point, when she had caught him by the shoulders with both hands to help him get some speed up. "Or I'll turn you over to a cop!"

One cop did overtake them shortly, on a motorcycle, but instead of stopping them, he shot ahead, holding the crosswise traffic in the side streets until they had gone by.

No vehicle had ever yet arrived

outside a burial ground with such indecent haste as this one, squealing to a skidding stop and filling the peaceful air with a smell of burned-out bearings. But she was already tumbling through the dignified ornamental gateway, into the tranquil setting of well groomed shrubbery, neat white markers, and winding, sanded paths.

She drew up abruptly, cupped both hands despairingly to the sides of her head, as though not knowing which way to turn. A distant muffled explosion, like a percussion cap buried in the ground, solved her dilemma for her. She sped in that direction like an arrow out of a bow.

Halfway she met a crowd of people running toward her—in fact scattering in all directions from a single focal point. Frightened people, squalling, gibbering people, one or two of them even stumbling over the turf in their frantic, heedless haste to reach the gates. She battled her way through them until she reached the spot where the stam-pede had started. An equally frightened but more courageous sexton stood at bay on a little mound of freshly upturned earth, a prayer book extended exorcisingly toward a coffin that was precariously balanced on the very lip of the grave. It was pounding as though it contained a dynamo. And as it pounded it rocked, almost see-sawed, with a violent inner agitation. The sexton's white lips move in hurried

exhortation, but no sound passed them.

The widow stood, wavering, by him.

Just as she got there a second gun shot echoed hollowly inside the monstrous thing, and wisps of smoke filtered out of bullet holes that the coffin must have received the night before. Champ Lane's wife dropped down beside it, threw her arms over it in maddened, forestalling embrace, to keep it from going over. She was aware of three men running up after her from the direction of the entrance gates. She recognized one of the men who had questioned her.

"Help me," she sobbed. "You followed me because you wanted Champ Lane—he's in there—help me get him out—"

The man's face went hard and incredulous. "In there—how?"

"He was going to hide in there—until the raid was over. In—with the dead man. He was so small he could do it all right. He was going to get out as soon as you'd gone—but his arm—it must have bled—Champ must have passed out and now they . . . Oh, don't stand there—help me get him out. A crowbar, a chisel—anything—"

A distorted mask of gray-faced terror that bore a remote resemblance to the widely publicized features of gunman Champ Lane, gazed up into their faces a few min-

utes later with mute, dog-like gratitude. His sworn enemies, at that moment, must have seemed like angels to him. Angels with handcuffs.

He handed them the gun that he had emptied, in his mad terror, when he came alive and found himself lying, weak and dazed from loss of blood, in the coffin with the dead man's cold body. The way he gave up the gun was almost like a gesture of devotion.

"They didn't hear my first shot—or maybe they thought it was the hearse backfiring." He shivered. A hoarse rattle shook in his throat as he looked down at the disarranged corpse. "I was—under that—for hours—all night. . . ."

As they held him upright between them and as one of them reached out a hand with the open jaws of the manacles reaching for his wrists, the small, tough man who had been the terror of forty-eight states suddenly dropped to his knees. The detective jerked the handcuffs back before Champ Lane could press his mouth against them.

"Bring on Atlanta, Leavenworth—even Alcatraz," he whimpered. "Lead me to 'em. They're *all* right with me!"

The headline in the papers that evening was, in a way, Champ Lane's epitaph.

CORNERED DESPERADO
KISSES CAPTOR'S HAND

John Dickson Carr

Guest in the House

One of Dr. Gideon Fell's most brilliant efforts—"a case so crazy that nobody but Dr. Fell could solve it"—with more twists and turns, more unexpected developments, than are found in many a full-length mystery novel . . .

TWO GUESTS, WHO WERE NOT staying the night at Cranleigh Court, left at shortly past 11 o'clock. Marcus Hunt saw them to the front door. Then he returned to the dining-room, where the poker chips were now stacked into neat piles of white, red, and blue. "Another game?" suggested Rolfe.

"No good," said Derek Henderson. His tone, as usual, was weary. "Not with just the three of us."

Their host stood by the sideboard and watched them. The long, low house, overlooking the Weald of Kent, was so quiet that their voices rose with startling loudness. The dining-room, large and paneled, was softly lighted by electric wall-candles which brought out the somber colors of the paintings. It is not often that anybody sees, in one room of an otherwise commonplace country house, two Rembrandts and a Van Dyck. There was a kind of defiance about those paintings.

To Arthur Rolfe—the art dealer—they represented enough money

to make him shiver. To Derek Henderson—the art critic—they represented a problem. What they represented to Marcus Hunt was not apparent.

Hunt stood by the sideboard, his fists on his hips, smiling. He was a middle-sized, stocky man, with a full face and a high complexion. Equip him with a tuft of chin-whisker and he would have looked like a Dutch burgher for a Dutch brush. His shirt-front bulged out untidily. He watched with ironical amusement while Henderson picked up a pack of cards in long fingers, cut them into two piles, and shuffled with a sharp flick of each thumb which made the cards melt together like a conjuring trick.

Henderson yawned.

"My boy," said Hunt, "you surprise me."

"That's what I try to do," answered Henderson, still wearily. He looked up. "But why do you say so, particularly?"

Henderson was young, he was long, he was lean, he was immacu-

late; and he wore a beard. It was a reddish beard, which moved some people to hilarity. But he wore it with an air of complete naturalness.

"I'm surprised," said Hunt, "that you enjoy anything so bourgeois—so plebeian—as poker."

"I enjoy reading people's characters," said Henderson. "Poker's the best way to do it, you know."

Hunt's eyes narrowed. "Oh? Can you read my character, for instance?"

"With pleasure," said Henderson. Absently he dealt himself a poker hand, face up. It contained a pair of fives, and the last card was the ace of spades. Henderson remained staring at it for a few seconds.

"And I can tell you," he went on, "that *you* surprise *me*. Do you mind if I'm frank? I had always thought of you as the Colossus of Business; the smasher; the plunger; the fellow who took the long chances. Now, you're not like that at all.

Marcus Hunt laughed. But Henderson was undisturbed.

"You're tricky, but you're cautious. I doubt if you ever took a long chance in your life. Another surprise"—he dealt himself a new hand—"is Mr. Rolfe here. He's the man who, given the proper circumstances, would take the long chance."

Arthur Rolfe considered this. He looked startled, but rather flattered.

Though in height and build not unlike Hunt, there was nothing untidy about him. He had a square, dark face, with thin shells of eye-glasses, and a worried forehead.

"I doubt that," he declared, very serious about this. Then he smiled. "A person who took long chances in my business would find himself in the soup." He glanced round the room. "Anyhow, I'd be too cautious to have three pictures, with an aggregate value of more than fifty thousand pounds, hanging in an unprotected downstairs room with French windows giving on a terrace." An almost frenzied note came into his voice. "Great Scot! Suppose a burglar—"

"Damn!" said Henderson unexpectedly.

Even Hunt jumped.

Ever since the poker party an uneasy atmosphere had been growing. Hunt had picked up an apple from a silver fruit bowl on the side-board. He was beginning to pare it with a fruit knife, a sharp wafer-thin blade which glittered in the light of the wall-lamps.

"You nearly made me slice my thumb off," he said, putting down the knife. "What's the matter with you?"

"It's the ace of spades," said Henderson, still languidly. "That's the second time it's turned up in five minutes."

Arthur Rolfe chose to be dense. "Well? What about it?"

"I think our young friend is be-

ing psychic," said Hunt, good-humored again. "Are you reading characters, or only telling fortunes?"

Henderson hesitated. His eyes moved to Hunt, and then to the wall over the sideboard where Rembrandt's *Old Women with Cap* stared back with the immobility and skin coloring of a red Indian. Then Henderson looked towards the French windows opening on the terrace.

"None of my affair," shrugged Henderson. "It's your house and your collection and your responsibility. But this fellow Cutler: what do you know about him?"

Marcus Hunt looked amused.

"Cutler? He's a friend of my niece's. Harriet picked him up in London, and asked me to invite him down here. Nonsense! Cutler's all right. What are you thinking, exactly?"

"Listen!" said Rolfe, holding up his hand.

The noise they heard, from the direction of the terrace, was not repeated. It was not repeated because the person who made it, a bewildered and uneasy young lady, had run swiftly to the far end, where she leaned against the balustrade.

Lew Cutler hesitated before going after her. The moonlight was so clear that one could see the mortar between the tiles which paved the terrace, and trace the design of the stone urns along the

balustrade. Harriet Davis wore a white gown with long, filmy skirts, which lifted clear of the ground as she ran.

Then she beckoned to him.

She was half sitting, half leaning against the rail. Her white arms were spread out, fingers gripping the stone. Dark hair and dark eyes became even more vivid by moonlight. He could see the rapid rise and fall of her breast; he could even trace the shadow of her eyelashes.

"That was a lie, anyhow," she said.

"What was?"

"What my Uncle Marcus said. You heard him." Harriet Davis's fingers tightened still more on the balustrade. But she nodded her head vehemently, with fierce accusation. "About my knowing you. And inviting you here. I never saw you before this weekend. Either Uncle Marcus is going out of his mind or . . . will you answer me just one question?"

"If I can."

"Very well. Are you by any chance a crook?"

She spoke with as much simplicity and directness as though she had asked him whether he might be a doctor or a lawyer. Lew Cutler was not unwise enough to laugh. She was in that mood where, to any woman, laughter is salt to a raw wound; she would probably have slapped his face.

"To be quite frank about it," he

said, "I'm not. Will you tell me why you asked?"

"This house," said Harriet, looking at the moon, "used to be guarded with burglar alarms. If you as much as touched a window, the whole place started clanging like a fire station. He had all the burglar alarms removed last week. Last week." She took her hands off the balustrade, and pressed them together hard. "The pictures used to be upstairs, in a locked room next to his bedroom. He had them moved downstairs—last week. It's almost as though my uncle *wanted* the house to be burgled."

Cutler knew that he must exercise great care.

"Perhaps he does." (Here she looked at Cutler quickly, but did not comment.) "For instance," he went on idly, "suppose one of his famous Rembrandts turned out to be a fake? It might be a relief not to have to show it to his expert friends."

The girl shook her head.

"No," she said. "They're all genuine. You see, I thought of that too."

Now was the time to hit, and hit hard. To Lew Cutler, in his innocence, there seemed to be no particular problem. He took out his cigarette case, and turned it over.

"Look here, Miss Davis, you're not going to like this. But I can tell you of cases in which people were rather anxious to have their prop-

erty 'stolen.' If a picture is insured for more than its value, and then is mysteriously 'stolen' one night—?"

"That might be all very well too," answered Harriet, still calmly. "Except that not one of those pictures had been insured."

The cigarette case, which was of polished metal, slipped through Cutler's fingers and fell with a clatter on the tiles. It spilled cigarettes, just as it spilled and confused his theories. As he bent over to pick it up, he could hear a church clock across the Weald strike the half hour after 11.

"You're sure of that?"

"I'm perfectly sure. He hasn't insured any of his pictures for as much as a penny. He says it's a waste of money."

"But—"

"Oh, I know! And I don't know why I'm talking to you like this. You're a stranger, aren't you?" She folded her arms, drawing her shoulders up as though she were cold. Uncertainty, fear, and plain nerves flicked at her eyelids. "But then Uncle Marcus is a stranger too. Do you know what I think? I think he's going mad."

"Hardly as bad as that, is it?"

"Yes, go on," the girl suddenly stormed at him. "Say it: go on and say it. That's easy enough. But you don't see him when his eyes seem to get smaller, and all that genial country-squire look goes out of his face. He's not a fake; he *hates* fakes, and goes out of his way to

expose them. But, if he hasn't gone clear out of his mind, what can he be up to?"

In something over three hours, they found out.

The burglar did not attack until half-past 2 in the morning. First, he smoked several cigarettes in the shrubbery below the rear terrace. When he heard the church clock strike, he waited a few minutes more, and then slipped up the steps to the French windows of the dining-room.

A chilly wind stirred at the turn of the night, in the hour of suicides and bad dreams. It smoothed grass and trees with a faint rustling. When the man glanced over his shoulder, the last of the moonlight distorted his face: it showed less a face than the blob of black-cloth mask, under a greasy cap pulled down over his ears.

He went to work on the middle window, with the contents of a folding tool-kit not so large as a motorist's. He fastened two short strips of adhesive tape to the glass just beside the catch. Then his glass-cutter sliced out a small semi-circle inside the tape.

It was done not without noise: it crunched like a dentist's drill in a tooth, and the man stopped to listen.

There was no answering noise. No dog barked.

With the adhesive tape holding the glass so that it did not fall and smash, he slid his gloved hand

through the opening and twisted the catch. The weight of his body deadened the creaking of the window when he pushed inside.

He knew exactly what he wanted. He put the tool-kit into his pocket, and drew out an electric torch. Its beam moved across to the sideboard; it touched gleaming silver, a bowl of fruit, and a wicked little knife thrust into an apple as though into someone's body; finally, it moved up the hag-face of the *Old Woman with Cap*.

This was not a large picture, and the burglar lifted it down easily. He pried out glass and frame. Though he tried to roll up the canvas with great care, the brittle paint cracked in small stars which wounded the hag's face. The burglar was so intent on this that he never noticed the presence of another person in the room.

He was an incautious burglar: he had no sixth sense which smelled murder.

Up on the second floor of the house, Lew Cutler was awakened by a muffled crash like that of metal objects falling.

He had not fallen into more than a half doze all night. He knew with certainty what must be happening, though he had no idea of why, or how, or to whom.

Cutler was out of bed and into his slippers as soon as he heard the first faint clatter from downstairs. His dressing gown would, as usual,

twist itself up like a rolled umbrella and defy all attempts to find the armholes whenever he wanted to hurry. But the little flashlight was ready in the pocket.

That noise seemed to have roused nobody else. With certain possibilities in his mind, he had never in his life moved so fast once he managed to get out of his bedroom. Not using his light, he went down two flights of deep-carpeted stairs without noise. In the lower hall he could feel a draught, which meant that a window or door had been opened somewhere. He made straight for the dining-room.

But he was too late.

Once the pencil-beam of Cutler's flashlight had swept round, he switched on a whole blaze of lights. The burglar was still here, right enough. But the burglar was lying very still in front of the sideboard; and, to judge by the amount of blood on his sweater and trousers, he would never move again.

"That's done it," Cutler said aloud.

A silver service, including a tea urn, had been toppled off the sideboard. Where the fruit bowl had fallen, the dead man lay on his back among a litter of oranges, apples, and a squashed bunch of grapes. The mask still covered the burglar's face; his greasy cap was flattened still further on his ears; his gloved hands were thrown wide.

Fragments of smashed picture-

glass lay round him, together with the empty frame, and the *Old Woman with Cap* had been half crumpled up under his body. From the position of the most conspicuous bloodstains, Cutler judged that the intruder had been stabbed through the chest with the stained fruit knife beside him.

"What is it?" said a voice almost at Cutler's ear.

He could not have been more startled if the fruit knife had pricked his ribs. He had seen nobody turning on lights in the hall, nor had he heard Harriet Davis approach. She was standing just behind him, wrapped in a Japanese kimono, with her dark hair round her shoulders. But, when he explained what had happened, she would not look into the dining-room; she backed away, shaking her head violently, like an urchin ready for flight.

"You had better wake up your uncle," Cutler said briskly, with a confidence he did not feel. "And the servants. I must use your telephone." Then he looked her in the eyes. "Yes, you're quite right. I think you've guessed it already. I'm a police officer."

She nodded.

"Yes. I guessed. Who are you? And is your name really Cutler?"

"I'm a sergeant of the Criminal Investigation Department. And my name really is Cutler. Your uncle brought me here."

"Why?"

"I don't know. He hasn't got round to telling me."

This girl's intelligence, even when overshadowed by fear, was direct and disconcerting. "But if he wouldn't say why he wanted a police officer, how did they come to send you? He'd have to tell them, wouldn't he?"

Cutler ignored it. "I must see your uncle. Will you go upstairs and wake him, please?"

"I can't," said Harriet. "Uncle Marcus isn't in his room."

"Isn't—?"

"No. I knocked at the door on my way down. He's gone."

Cutler took the stairs two treads at a time. Harriet had turned on all the lights on her way down, but nothing stirred in the bleak, over-decorated passages.

Marcus Hunt's bedroom was empty. His dinner jacket had been hung up neatly on the back of a chair, his shirt laid across the seat with collar and tie on top of it. Hunt's watch ticked loudly on the dressing table. His money and keys were there too. But he had not gone to bed, for the bedspread was undisturbed.

The suspicion which came to Lew Cutler, listening to the thin insistent ticking of that watch in the drugged hour before dawn, was so fantastic that he could not credit it.

He started downstairs again, and on the way he met Arthur Rolfe blundering out of another bedroom down the hall. The art deal-

er's stocky body was wrapped in a flannel dressing gown. He was not wearing his eyeglasses, which gave his face a bleary and rather caved-in expression. He planted himself in front of Cutler, and refused to budge.

"Yes," said Cutler. "You don't have to ask. It's a burglar."

"I knew it," said Rolfe calmly. "Did he get anything?"

"No. He was murdered."

For a moment Rolfe said nothing, but his hand crept into the breast of his dressing gown as though he felt pain there.

"Murdered? You don't mean the *burglar* was murdered?"

"Yes."

"But why? By an accomplice, you mean? Who is the burglar?"

"That," said Lew Cutler, "is what I intend to find out."

In the lower hall he found Harriet Davis, who was now standing in the doorway of the dining-room and looking steadily at the body by the sideboard. Though her face hardly moved a muscle, her eyes brimmed over.

"You're going to take off the mask, aren't you?" she asked, without turning round.

Stepping with care to avoid squashed fruit and broken glass, Cutler leaned over the dead man. He pushed back the peak of the greasy cap; he lifted the black-cloth mask, which was clumsily held by an elastic band; and he found what he expected to find.

The burglar was Marcus Hunt—stabbed through the heart while attempting to rob his own house.

"You see, sir," Cutler explained to Dr. Gideon Fell on the following afternoon, "that's the trouble. However you look at it, the case makes no sense."

Again he went over the facts.

"Why should the man burgle his own house and steal his own property? Every one of those paintings is valuable, and not a single one is insured! Consequently, why? Was the man a simple lunatic? What did he think he was doing?"

The village of Sutton Valence, straggling like a gray-white Italian town along the very peak of the Weald, was full of hot sunshine. In the apple orchard behind the white inn of the *Tabard*, Dr. Gideon Fell sat at a garden table among wasps, with a pint tankard at his elbow. Dr. Fell's vast bulk was clad in a white linen suit. His pink face smoked in the heat, and his wary lookout for wasps gave him a regrettably wall-eyed appearance as he pondered.

He said: "Superintendent Hadley suggested that I might—harumph—look in here. The local police are in charge, aren't they?"

"Yes. I'm merely standing by."

"Hadley's exact words to me were, 'It's so crazy that nobody but you could solve it.' The man's flattery becomes more nauseating every day." Dr. Fell scowled. "I say,

does anything else strike you as queer about this business?"

"Well, why should a man burgle his own house?"

"No, no, no!" growled Dr. Fell. "Don't be obsessed with that point. Don't become hypnotized by it. For instance"—a wasp hovered near his tankard, and he distended his cheeks and blew it away with one vast puff like Father Neptune—"for instance, the young lady seems to have raised an interesting question. If Marcus Hunt wouldn't say why he wanted a detective in the house, why did the C.I.D. consent to send you?"

Cutler shrugged his shoulders.

"Because," he said, "Chief Inspector Ames thought Hunt was up to funny business, and meant to stop it."

"What sort of funny business?"

"A faked burglary to steal his own pictures for the insurance. It looked like the old, old game of appealing to police to divert suspicion. In other words, sir, exactly what this appeared to be: until I learned, and today proved, that not one of those damned pictures has ever been insured for a penny."

Cutler hesitated.

"It can't have been a practical joke," he went on. "Look at the elaborateness of it! Hunt put on old clothes from which all tailors' tabs and laundry marks were removed. He put on gloves and a mask. He got hold of a torch and an up-to-date kit of burglar's tools.

He went out of the house by the back door—we found it open later. He smoked a few cigarettes in the shrubbery below the terrace—we found his footprints in the soft earth. He cut a pane of glass . . . but I've told you all that."

"And then," mused Dr. Fell, "somebody killed him."

"Yes. The last and worst 'why.' Why should anybody have killed him?"

"H'm. Clues?"

"Negative." Cutler took out his notebook. "According to the police surgeon, he died of a direct heart-wound from a blade—presumably that fruit knife—so thin that the wound was difficult to find. There were a number of his fingerprints, but nobody else's. We did find one odd thing, though. A number of pieces in the silver service of the sideboard were scratched in a queer way. It looked almost as though, instead of being swept off the sideboard in a struggle, they had been piled up on top of each other like a tower and then pushed—"

Cutler paused, for Dr. Fell was shaking his big head back and forth with an expression of Gargantuan distress.

"Well, well, well," he was saying. "Well, well, well. And you call that negative evidence?"

"Isn't it? It doesn't explain why a man burgles his own house."

"Look here," said the doctor mildly. "I should like to ask you

just one question. What is the most important point in this affair? One moment! I did not say the most interesting—I said the most important. Surely it is the fact that a man has been murdered?"

"Yes, sir. Naturally."

"I mention the fact"—the doctor was apologetic—"because it seems in danger of being overlooked. It hardly interests you. You are concerned only with Hunt's senseless masquerade. You don't mind a throat being cut, but you can't stand a leg being pulled. Why not try working at it from the other side, and asking who killed Hunt?"

Cutler was silent for a long time.

"The servants are out of it," he said at length. "They sleep in another wing on the top floor; and for some reason," he hesitated, "somebody locked them in last night." His doubts, even his dreads, were beginning to take form. "There was a fine blow-up over that when the house was roused. Of course, the murderer could have been an outsider."

"You know it wasn't," said Dr. Fell. "Would you mind taking me to Cranleigh Court?"

They came out on the terrace in the hottest part of the afternoon.

Dr. Fell sat down on a wicker settee, with a dispirited Harriet beside him. Derek Henderson, in flannels, perched his long figure on the balustrade. Arthur Rolfe alone

wore a dark suit and seemed out of place. For the pale green and brown of the Kentish lands, which rarely acquired harsh color, now blazed. No air stirred, no leaf moved in that brilliant thickness of heat; and down in the garden, towards their left, the water of the swimming pool sparkled with hot, hard light. Cutler felt it like a weight on his eyelids.

Derek Henderson's beard was at once languid and yet aggressive.

"It's no good," he said. "Don't keep on asking me why Hunt should have burgled his own house. But I'll give you a tip."

"Which is?" inquired Dr. Fell.

"Whatever the reason was," returned Henderson, "it was a good reason. Hunt was much too canny and cautious ever to do anything without a good reason. I told him so last night."

Dr. Fell spoke sharply. "Cautious? Why do you say that?"

"Well, for instance. I take three cards on the draw. Hunt takes one. I bet; he sees me and raises. I cover that, and raise again. Hunt drops out. In other words, it's fairly certain he's filled his hand, but not so certain I'm holding much more than a pair. Yet Hunt drops out. So with my three sevens I bluff him out of his straight. He played a dozen hands just like that."

Henderson began to chuckle. Seeing the expression on Harriet's face, he checked himself and became solemn.

"But then, of course," Henderson added, "he had a lot on his mind last night."

Nobody could fail to notice the change of tone.

"So? And what did he have on his mind?"

"Exposing somebody he had always trusted," replied Henderson coolly. "That's why I didn't like it when the ace of spades turned up so often."

"You'd better explain that," said Harriet, after a pause. "I don't know what you're hinting at, but you'd better explain that. He told you he intended to expose somebody he had always trusted?"

"No. Like myself, he only hinted at it."

It was the stolid Rolfe who stormed into the conversation then. Rolfe had the air of a man determined to hold hard to reason, but finding it difficult.

"Listen to me," snapped Rolfe.

"I heard a great deal, at one time or another, about Mr. Hunt's liking to expose people. Very well!" He slid one hand into the breast of his coat, in a characteristic gesture. "But where in the name of sanity does that leave us? He wants to expose someone. And to do that, he puts on outlandish clothes and masquerades as a burglar. Is that sensible? I tell you, the man was mad! There's no other explanation."

"There are five other explanations," said Dr. Fell.

Derek Henderson slowly got up from his seat on the balustrade, but he sat down again at a savage gesture from Rolfe.

"I will not, however," pursued Dr. Fell, "waste your time with four of them. We are concerned with only one explanation: the real one."

"And you know the real one?" asked Henderson sharply.

"I think so."

"Since when?"

"Since I had the opportunity of looking at all of you," answered Dr. Fell.

He settled back massively in the wicker settee, so that its frame creaked and cracked like a ship's bulkhead in a heavy sea. His vast chin was outthrust, and he nodded absently as though to emphasize some point that was quite clear in his own mind.

"I've already had a word with the local inspector," he went on suddenly. "He will be here in a few minutes. And, at my suggestion, he will have a request for all of you. I sincerely hope nobody will refuse."

"Request?" said Henderson. "What request?"

"It's a very hot day," said Dr. Fell, blinking towards the swimming pool. "He's going to suggest that you all go in for a swim."

Harriet uttered a kind of despairing mutter, and turned as though appealing to Lew Cutler.

"That," continued Dr. Fell, "will

be the politest way of drawing attention to the murderer. In the meantime, let me call your attention to one point in the evidence which seems to have been generally overlooked. Mr. Henderson, do you know anything about heart wounds, made by a steel blade as thin as a wafer?"

"Like Hunt's wound? No. What about them?"

"There is practically no exterior bleeding," answered Dr. Fell.

"But—!" Harriet was beginning, when Cutler stopped her.

"The police surgeon, in fact, called attention to that wound which was so 'difficult to find.' The victim dies almost at once; and the edges of the wound compress. But in that case," argued Dr. Fell, "how did the late Mr. Hunt come to have so much blood on his sweater, and even splashed on his trousers?"

"Well?"

"He didn't," answered Dr. Fell simply. "Mr. Hunt's blood never got on his clothes at all."

"I can't stand this," said Harriet, jumping to her feet. "I—I'm sorry, but have you gone mad yourself? Are you telling us we didn't see him lying by that sideboard, with all that blood on him?"

"Oh, yes. You saw that."

"Let him go on," said Henderson, who was rather white round the nostrils. "Let him rave."

"It is, I admit, a fine point," said Dr. Fell. "But it answers your ques-

tion, repeated to the point of nausea, as to why the eminently sensible Mr. Hunt chose to dress up in burglar's clothes and play burglar. The answer is short and simple. He didn't."

"It must be plain to everybody,"

Dr. Fell went on, opening his eyes wide, "that Mr. Hunt was deliberately setting a trap for someone—for the real burglar. He believed that a certain person might try to steal one or several of his pictures. He probably knew that this person had tried similar games before, in other country houses: that is, an inside job which was carefully planned to look like an outside job. So he made things easy for this thief, in order to trap him, with a police officer in the house.

"The burglar, a sad fool, fell for it. This thief, a guest in the house, waited until well past 2 o'clock in the morning. He then put on his old clothes, mask, gloves, and the rest of it. He let himself out by the back door. He went through all the motions we have erroneously been attributing to Marcus Hunt. Then the trap snapped. Just as he was rolling up the Rembrandt, he heard a noise. He swung his light round. And he saw Marcus Hunt, in pajamas and dressing gown, looking at him.

"Yes, there was a fight. Hunt flew at him. The thief snatched up a fruit knife and fought back. In the struggle Marcus Hunt forced

his opponent's hand back. The fruit knife gashed the thief's chest, inflicting a superficial but badly bleeding gash. It sent the thief over the edge of insanity. He wrenched at Marcus Hunt's wrist, caught up the knife, and stabbed Hunt in the heart.

"Then, in a quiet house, with a little beam of light streaming out from the torch on the sideboard, the murderer sees something that will hang him. He sees the blood from his own superficial wound seeping down his clothes.

"How is he to get rid of those clothes? He cannot destroy them, or get them away from the house. Inevitably the house will be searched, and they will be found. Without the bloodstains, they would seem ordinary clothes in his wardrobe. But with the bloodstains—

"There is only one thing he can do."

Harriet Davis was standing behind the wicker settee, shading her eyes against the glare of the sun. Her hand did not tremble when she said:

"He changed clothes with my uncle."

"That's it," growled Dr. Fell. "That's the whole sad story. The murderer dressed the body in his own clothes, making a puncture with the knife in sweater, shirt, and undervest. He then slipped on Mr. Hunt's pajamas and dressing gown, which at a pinch he could

always claim as his own. Hunt's wound had bled hardly at all. His dressing gown, I think, had come open in the fight, so that all the thief had to trouble him was a tiny puncture in the jacket of the pajamas.

"But, once he had done this, he had to hypnotize you all into the belief that there would have been no time for a change of clothes. He had to make it seem that the fight occurred just *then*. He had to rouse the house. So he brought down echoing thunders by pushing over a pile of silver, and slipped upstairs."

Dr. Fell paused.

"The burglar could never have been Marcus Hunt, you know," he added. "We learn that Hunt's fingerprints were all over the place. Yet the murdered man was wearing gloves."

There was a swishing of feet in the grass below the terrace, and a tread of heavy boots coming up the terrace steps. The local Inspector of police, buttoned up and steaming in his uniform, was followed by two constables.

Dr. Fell turned round.

"Ah!" he said, breathing deeply. "They've come to see about that swimming party, I imagine. It is easy to patch up a flesh wound with lint and cotton, or even a handkerchief. But such a wound will become infernally conspicu-

ous in anyone who is forced to climb into bathing trunks."

"But it couldn't have been—" cried Harriet. Her eyes moved round. Her fingers tightened on Lew Cutler's arm, an instinctive gesture which he was to remember long afterwards, when he knew her even better.

"Exactly," agreed the doctor, wheezing with pleasure. "It could not have been a long, thin, gangling fellow like Mr. Henderson. It assuredly could not have been a small and slender girl like yourself."

"There is only one person who, as we know, is just about Marcus Hunt's height and build, who could have put his own clothes on Hunt without any suspicion. That is the same person who, though he managed to staunch the wound in his chest, has been constantly running his hand inside the breast of his coat to make certain the bandage is secure. Just as Mr. Rolfe is doing now."

Arthur Rolfe sat very quiet, with his right hand still in the breast of his jacket. His face had grown smeary in the hot sunlight, but the eyes behind those thin shells of glasses remained inscrutable. He spoke only once, through dry lips, after they had cautioned him.

"I should have taken the young pup's warning," he said. "After all, he told me I would take the long chance."

Ray Bradbury

The Fruit at the Bottom of the Bowl

Here are some quotes from reviews of Ray Bradbury's stories: "unique," "defy classification," "haunting," "fascinating," "can make your blood run cold." Which of the foregoing do you think applies to the story that follows?

WILLIAM ACTON rose to his feet. The clock on the mantel ticked midnight.

He looked at his fingers and he looked at the large room around him and he looked at the man lying on the floor who was dead and would say no more sayings nor brutalize more brutalities. William Acton, whose fingers had stroked typewriter keys and made love and fried ham and eggs for early breakfasts, had now accomplished a murder with those same ten, whorled fingers.

He had never thought of himself as a sculptor and yet, in this moment, looking down between his hands at the body upon the polished hardwood floor he realized that by some sculptural clenching and remodeling and twisting of human clay he had taken hold of this man named Arthur Huxley and changed his physiognomy, the very frame of his body.

With a twist of his fingers he had wiped away the exacting glitter of Huxley's gray eyes; replaced it with an airless dullness of eye cold

in socket. The lips, always pink and sensuous, were gaped to show the equine teeth, the yellow incisors, the nicotined canines, the gold-inlaid molars. The nose, pink also, was now mottled, pale, discolored, as were the ears. Huxley's hands, upon the floor, were open, pleading for the first time in their lives instead of demanding.

Yes, it was an artistic conception. On the whole, the change had done Huxley a share of good. Death made him a handsomer man to deal with. You could talk to him now and he'd have to listen.

William Acton looked at his own fingers.

It was done. He could not change it back. Had anybody heard? He listened. The normal late sounds of street traffic outside continued. There was no banging of the house door, no shoulders wrecking the portal into kindling, no voices demanding entrance. The murder, the sculptoring of clay from warmth into cold was done, and nobody knew.

Now what? The clock ticked

midnight. His every impulse exploded him in a hysteria toward the door. Get out, get away, run, never come back, board a train, get a taxi, get, go, run, walk, saunter, but get the blazes *out* of here!

His hands hovered before his eyes, floating, turning.

He turned them in slow deliberation; they felt airy and feather-light. Why was he staring at them this way, he inquired of himself. Was there something in them of immense interest that he should pause now, after a successful throttling, and examine them micrometer by micrometer?

They were ordinary hands. Not thick, not thin, not long, not short, not hairy, not naked, not manicured and yet not dirty, not soft and yet not calloused, not wrinkled and yet not smooth; not murdering hands at all—and yet not innocent. He found them miracles to look upon.

It was not the hands as hands he was interested in, nor the fingers as fingers. In the numb timelessness after an accomplished violence he found interest only in the *tips* of his fingers.

The clock ticked on the mantel.

He knelt by Huxley's body, took a handkerchief from Huxley's pocket and began methodically to swab Huxley's throat with it. He brushed and massaged the throat and wiped the face and the back of the neck with a fierce energy. Then he stood up.

He looked at the throat. He looked at the polished floor. He bent slowly and gave the floor a few dabs with the handkerchief; then he scowled and swabbed the floor; first, near the head of the corpse, secondly, near the arms. Then he polished the floor all around the body. He polished the floor one yard from the body on all sides. Then he polished the floor *two* yards from the body on all sides. Then he polished the floor *three* yards from the body in all directions. Then he—

He stopped. . . .

There was a moment when he saw the entire house, the halls, the doors, the furniture; and as clearly as if it were being repeated word for word he heard Huxley talking and himself talking just the way they had talked only an hour ago.

Finger on the doorbell. Door opening.

"Oh It's *you*, Acton."

"I want to see you, Huxley. It's important."

"I don't see—Well, all right. Come in."

He had gone in.

"Go on into the library," said Huxley.

He had *touched* the library door.

"Drink?"

"I need one."

"There's a bottle there of burgundy, Acton. Mind getting it, I'm terribly tired."

Surely. Get it. *Handle* it. *Touch* it. He did.

"Some interesting first editions there, Acton. Look at that binding. *Look* at it."

He had *touched* the books and the library table and *touched* the burgundy bottle and burgundy glasses.

Now, squatting on the floor beside Huxley's cold body with the polishing handkerchief in his fingers, motionless, he stared at the house, the walls, the furniture about him, his eyes widening, his mouth dropping, stunned by what he realized and what he saw. He shut his eyes, dropped his head, crushed the handkerchief between his hands, wadding it, biting his lips with his teeth, pulling in on himself.

The fingerprints were everywhere!

"Mind getting the burgundy, Acton, eh? The burgundy bottle, eh? With your fingers, eh? I'm terribly tired. You understand?"

A pair of gloves.

Before he did one more thing, before he polished another area, he must have a pair of gloves, else he might unintentionally, after polishing a surface, re-distribute his identity.

He put his hands in his pockets. He walked through the house to the hall umbrella stand, the hat-rack. Huxley's overcoat. He pulled out the overcoat pockets.

No gloves.

His hands in his pockets again he walked upstairs, walking with a

controlled swiftness, allowing himself nothing frantic, nothing wild. He had made the initial mistake of not wearing gloves (but, after all, he hadn't *planned* a murder, and his subconscious, which *may* have known of the crime before its commitment, had not even hinted he might need gloves before the night was finished), so now he had to pay for his sin of omission. Somewhere in the house there must be at least *one* pair of gloves. He could take his time; there was little chance of anyone visiting Huxley at this hour. He would have until 6 in the morning when Huxley's friends were to pick him up for a scheduled hunting trip.

He went about upstairs opening drawers, using the handkerchief as blotter. He untidied 70 or 80 drawers in six upstairs rooms, left them with tongues, so to speak, hanging out, went on to new ones. He felt naked, unable to do anything until he found gloves. He might go through the house with the handkerchief, buffing every possible surface where fingerprints might lie, accidentally bump a wall here or there thus sealing his own fate with one microscopic, whorling symbol. It would be putting a stamp of approval on the murder, that's what it would be. Like those old waxen seals in the old days when they rattled a papyrus, flourished ink on it, dusted it with sand to dry the ink, and set their signet ring into hot impressionable crimson tallow at

the bottom. So it would be if he left one, mind you, *one* fingerprint upon the scene. His approval of the murder did not extend as far as affixing said seal.

More drawers. Be quiet, be curious, be careful, he told himself.

At the bottom of the 85th drawer he found gloves.

"Oh my Lord, my Lord." He slumped against the bureau, sighing. He tried the gloves on, held them up, proudly flexed them, buttoned them. They were soft, gray, thick, impregnable. He could do all sorts of tricks with his hands now and leave no trace. He thumbed his nose in the bedroom mirror, sucking his teeth.

"No!" cried Huxley.

What a wicked plan it had been!

Huxley had fallen to the floor, *purposely!* Oh what a wickedly clever man was Huxley! Down onto the hardwood floor had dropped Mr. Huxley, with William Acton after him. They had rolled and tussled and clawed at the floor, printing and printing it with their frantic fingertips! Huxley had slipped away a few feet, Acton crawling after to lay hands on his neck and squeeze until the life came out of him like paste from a tube!

Gloved, William Acton returned to the room and knelt down upon the floor and laboriously began the task of swabbing every wildly infested inch of it. Inch by inch, inch

by inch, he polished and polished until he could almost see his intent, sweating face in it. Then he came to a table and polished the leg of it, on up its stolid body and along the knobs and on the top, and he came to a bowl of wax fruit and polished the filigree silver and he plucked out the wax fruit and polished them clean, leaving the fruit at the bottom unpolished.

"I'm *sure* I didn't touch *them*."

After rubbing the table he came to a picture frame over it:

"I'm certain I didn't touch that," he said, and stood looking at it.

He looked at all the doors in the room. Which doors had he used to-night? He couldn't remember. Polish all of them, then, He started on the doorknobs, shined them all up and then he curried the doors from head to foot, taking no chances. Then he went to all the furniture in the room and wiped the chair arms and rubbed the material fabric itself.

"That chair you're sitting in, Acton, is a old Louis XIV piece. Feel that material," said Huxley.

"I didn't come here to talk furniture, Huxley! I came about Lily."

"Lily, eh? Oh, come off it, you're not that serious about her. She doesn't love you, you know. She's told me she'll go with me to Mexico City next month."

"You and your money and your damned furniture!"

"It's nice furniture, Acton; be a good guest and feel of it."

Fingerprints can be found on fabric.

"Huxley!" William Acton stared at the body. "Did you *know* I was going to kill you! Did your subconscious know, just as my subconscious knew? And did your subconscious have you make me go about the house handling, touching, *fondling* books, dishes, doors, chairs? Were you *that* clever and *that* mean?"

He washed the chairs drily with the clenched kerchief. Then he remembered the body—he hadn't dry-washed *it*. He went to it and turned it now this way, now that, and burnished every surface of it. He even shined the shoes.

While shining the shoes his face took on a little tremor of worry and after a moment he got up and walked over to that table.

He took out and polished the wax fruit at the *bottom* of the bowl.

"Better," he whispered, and went back to the body.

But as he crouched over the body his eyelids twicked and his jaw moved from side to side and he debated, then he got up and turned and walked once more to the table.

He polished the picture frame.

While polishing the picture frame he discovered—

The wall.

"That," he said, "is silly."

"Oh!" Huxley had cried, fending him off. He had given Acton a shove as they struggled. Acton had fallen against one wall, had got up,

touching the wall, and had run toward Huxley again. He had strangled Huxley. Huxley had died . . .

Acton turned steadfastly from the wall, with equilibrium and decision. The harsh words and the action faded in his mind. He glanced at the four walls.

"Ridiculous," he said.

From the corners of his eyes he saw something on one wall.

"I refuse to pay attention," he said to distract himself. "The next room, now. I'll be methodical. Let's see, altogether we were in the hall, the library, *this* room, and the dining room and the kitchen."

There was a spot on the wall behind him.

Well, *wasn't* there?

He turned, angrily. "All right, all right, just to be *sure*," and he went over and couldn't find any spot. Oh, a *little* one, yes, right—*there*. He dabbed it. It wasn't a fingerprint anyhow. He finished with it and his gloved hand leaned against the wall and he looked at the wall and the way it went over to his right and over to his left and how it went down to his feet and up over his head and he said softly, "No." He looked up and down and over and across and he said, quietly, "That would be too much." How many square feet? "I don't give a damn," he said. But unknown to his eyes his gloved fingers moved in a little rubbing rhythm on the wall.

He peered at his hand and the

wallpaper. He looked over his shoulder at the other room. "I must go in there and polish the essentials," he told himself, but his hand remained, as if to hold the wall, or himself, up. His face hardened.

Without a word he began to scrub the wall, up and down, back and forth, up and down, as high as he could stretch and as low as he could bend.

Once he stopped and put his hands on his hips.

"Ridiculous, oh my Lord, Ridiculous."

But you must be certain, his thought said to him.

"Yes, one must be certain," he replied. "One *must* be certain."

And again he rubbed and polished.

He got one wall finished, and then . . .

He came to another wall.

"What time *is* it?" he wondered, drily.

He looked at the mantel clock. An hour gone. It was five after one.

He looked at this new fresh wall. "Silly," he said. "It's flawless. I won't touch it." He turned away.

From the corners of his eyes he saw the little webs. When his back was turned the little spiders came out of the woodwork and delicately spun their fragile little half-invisible webs. Not upon the wall at his left—that was already washed fresh; but upon the three walls as yet untouched. Each time he stared directly at them the spiders popped

back into the woodwork only to spindle out as he retreated. "Those walls are all right," he insisted, in a half-shout. "I won't touch them!"

He went to a writing desk at which Huxley had been seated earlier. He opened a drawer and took out what he was looking for. A little magnifying glass Huxley sometimes used for reading. He took the magnifier and approach the wall uneasily.

Fingerprints.

"But those aren't *mine*!" He laughed, unsteadily. "I *didn't* put them there! I'm *sure* I didn't! A servant, a butler, or a maid, perhaps."

The wall was full of them.

"Look at this one here," he said. "Long and tapered, like a woman's—I'd bet money on it."

"Would you?"

"I would!"

"Are you certain?"

"Yes!"

"Positive?"

"Well—yes."

"Absolutely?"

"Yes, damn it, yes!"

"Wipe it out, anyway."

"There, by gad!"

"Out damned spot, eh, Acton?"

"And this one, over here," scoffed Acton. "That's the print of a fat man."

"Are you sure?"

"Don't start that again!" he snapped, and rubbed it out. He pulled off a glove and held his hand up in the glary light.

"Look at it, you idiot! See how the whorls go? See!"

"That proves nothing!"

"Oh, all right!" In rage he began to sweep the wall up and down and back and forth with his gloved hands, sweating, grunting and swearing, bending and rising.

He took off his coat, put it on a chair.

"Two o'clock," he said, finishing the wall and looking at the clock.

He walked over to the bowl and took out the waxed fruit and polished the ones at the bottom and put them back and polished the picture frame.

He looked up at the chandelier.

His fingers twitched at his sides. His mouth slipped open and the tongue moved along his lips and he looked at the chandelier and looked away and looked back at the chandelier and looked at Huxley's body and then at the crystal chandelier with its long pearls of rainbow glass.

He got a chair and brought it over under the chandelier and put one foot up on it and took it down and threw the chair violently into a corner. Then he ran out of the room, leaving one wall as yet unwashed.

In the dining room he came to a table.

"I want to show you my Georgian cutlery, Acton," Huxley had said.

"I haven't time," Acton said.

"Nonsense, look at this silver,

this exquisite craftsmanship, look at it."

Acton paused over the table where the boxes of cutlery were laid out, hearing once more Huxley's voice, remembering all the touchings and gesturings.

Now Acton wiped the forks and spoons and took down all the plates and special ceramic dishes from the wall shelf . . .

"Here's a lovely bit of ceramics by Gertrude and Otto Natzler, Acton, are you familiar with their work?"

"It is lovely."

"Pick it up. Turn it over. See the fine thinness of the bowl, hand-thrown on a turntable, thin as egg-shell, incredible. And the amazing volcanic glaze? Handle it, go ahead, I don't mind."

Handle it. Go ahead. Pick it up!

Acton sobbed unevenly. He hurled the pottery against the wall. It shattered and spread, flaking wildly, upon the floor.

An instant later he was on his knees. Every piece, every shard of it, must be regained. Fool, fool, fool, he cried to himself, shaking his head and shutting and opening his eyes and bending under the table. Find every piece, you idiot—not one fragment of it must be left behind. Fool, fool. He gathered them. Are they all here? He looked at them on the table before him. He looked under the table again and under the chairs and the service bureaux and found one more piece by

match-light and started to polish each little fragment as if it were a precious stone. He laid them all out neatly upon the shining polished table.

"A lovely bit of ceramics, Acton; go ahead—*handle* it."

He took out the linen and wiped it and wiped the chairs and tables and doorknobs and window panes and ledges and drapes and wiped the floor and found the kitchen, panting, breathing violently, and took off his vest and adjusted his gloves and wiped the glittering chromium . . . "I want to show you my house, Acton," said Huxley. "Come along". . . And he wiped all the utensils and the silver faucets and the mixing bowls, for now he had forgotten what he had touched and what he had not. Huxley and he had lingered here, in the kitchen, Huxley prideful of its array to cover his nervousness at the presence of a potential killer, perhaps wanting to be near the knives if they were needed. They had idled, touched this, that, something else—there was no remembering what or how much or how many—and he finished the kitchen and came through the hall into the room where Huxley lay.

He cried out.

He had forgotten to wash the fourth wall of the room. And while he was gone the little spiders had come out of the fourth unwashed wall and swarmed over the already

clean walls, dirtying them again! On the ceilings, from the chandelier, in the corners, on the floor a million little whorled webs hung billowing at his scream! Tiny, tiny little webs, no bigger than, ironically, your—finger!

As he watched the webs were woven over the picture frame, the fruit bowl, the body, the floor. Prints wielded the paper knife, pulled out drawers, touched the table-top, touched, touched, touched everything everywhere.

He polished the floor wildly, wildly. He rolled the body over and cried on it while he washed it and got up and walked over and polished the fruit at the bottom of the bowl. Then he put a chair under the chandelier and got up and polished each little hanging fire of it, shaking it like a crystal tambourine until it tilted bell-wise in the air. Then he leaped off the chair and gripped the doorknobs and got up on other chairs and swabbed the walls higher and higher and ran to the kitchen and got a broom and wiped the webs down from the ceilings and polished the bottom fruit of the bowl and washed the body and doorknobs and silverware and found the hall banister and followed the banister upstairs.

Three o'clock! Everywhere, with a fierce, mechanical intensity, clocks ticked! There were twelve rooms downstairs and eight above. He figured the yards and yards of space and time needed. One hun-

dred chairs, six sofas, 27 tables, six radios. And under and on top and behind. He yanked furniture out away from walls and, sobbing, wiped them clean of years-old dust, and staggered and followed the banister up the stairs, handling, erasing, rubbing, polishing, because if he left one little print it would reproduce and make a million more! and the job would have to be done all over again and now it was 4 o'clock! and his arms ached and his eyes were swollen and staring and he moved sluggishly about, on strange legs, his head down, his arms moving, swabbing and rubbing, bedroom by bedroom, closet by closet. . . .

They found him at 6:30 that morning.

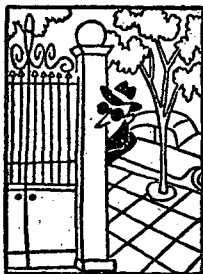
In the attic.

The entire house was polished to a brilliance. Vases shone like glass stars. Chairs were burnished. Bronzes, brasses, and coppers were all aglint. Floors sparkled. Banisters gleamed.

Everything glittered. Everything shone, everything was bright!

They found him in the attic, polishing the old trunks and the old frames and the old chairs and the old carriages and toys and music boxes and vases and cutlery and rocking horses and dusty Civil War coins. He was half through the attic when the police officer walked up behind him with a gun.

On the way out of the house Acton polished the front door-knob with his handkerchief, and slammed it in triumph.



Nicholas Blake

The Assassins' Club

Nicholas Blake is the pen-name of Cecil Day Lewis, one of the best known of contemporary British poets. No less an authority than Edgar A. Poe once divined the inextricable relationship between poetry and literary ratiocination . . .

NO," THOUGHT NIGEL STRANGE-ways, looking round the table, "no one would ever guess."

Ever since, a quarter of an hour ago, they had assembled in the ante-room for sherry, Nigel had been feeling more and more nervous—a nervousness greater than the prospect of having to make an after-dinner speech seemed to warrant. It was true that, as the guest of honor, something more than the usual postprandial convivialities would be expected of him. And of course the company present would, from its nature, be especially critical. But still, he had done this sort of thing often enough before; he knew he was pretty good at it. Why the acute state of jitters, then? After it was all over, Nigel was tempted to substitute "foreboding" for "jitters"; to wonder whether he oughtn't to have proclaimed these very curious feelings, like Cassandra, from the house-top—even at the risk of spoiling what looked like being a real peach of a dinner party. After all, the dinner party did get spoiled, anyway, and soon enough, too. But,

taking all things into consideration, it probably wouldn't have made any difference.

It was in an attempt to dispel this cloud of uneasiness that Nigel began to play the old game of identity-guessing with himself. There was a curious uniformity among the faces of the majority of the twenty-odd diners. The women—there were only three of them—looked homely, humorous, dowdy—and-be-damned-to-it. The men, Nigel finally decided, resembled in the mass sanitary inspectors or very minor Civil Servants. They were most of them rather undersized, and ran to drooping moustaches, gold-rimmed spectacles and a general air of mild ineffectualness. There were exceptions, of course. That elderly man in the middle of the table, with the face of a dyspeptic and superannuated bloodhound—it was not difficult to place him; even without the top-hat or the wig with which the public normally associated him, Lord Justice Pottinger could easily be recognized—the most celebrated criminal judge of

his generation. Then that leonine, mobile face on his left; it had been as much photographed as any society beauty's; and well it might, for Sir Eldred Travers' golden tongue had—it was whispered—saved as many murderers as Justice Pottinger had hanged. There were one or two other exceptions, such as the dark-haired, poetic-looking young man sitting on Nigel's right and rolling bread-pellets.

"No," said Nigel, aloud this time, "no one would possibly guess."

"Guess what?" inquired the young man.

"The bloodthirsty character of this assembly." He took up the menu-card, at the top of which was printed in red letters.

THE ASSASSINS

Dinner, December 20th

"No," laughed the young man, "we don't look like murderers, I must admit—not even murderers by proxy."

"Good lord! are you in the trade, too?"

"Yes. Ought to have introduced myself. Name of Herbert Dale."

Nigel looked at the young man with increased interest. Dale had published only two crime-novels, but he was already accepted as one of the *élite* of detective writers; he could not otherwise have been a member of that most exclusive of clubs, the Assassins; for, apart from

a representative of the Bench, the Bar, and Scotland Yard, this club was composed solely of the princes of detective fiction.

It was at this point that Nigel observed two things—that the hand which incessantly rolled bread-pellets was shaking, and that, on the glossy surface of the menu-card Dale had just laid down, there was a moist finger-mark.

"Are you making a speech, too?" Nigel said.

"Me? Good lord, no. Why?"

"I thought you looked nervous," said Nigel, in his direct way.

The young man laughed, a little too loudly. And, as though that was some kind of signal, one of those unrehearsed total silences fell upon the company. Even in the street outside, the noises seemed to be damped, as though an enormous soft pedal had been pressed down on everything. Nigel realized that it must have been snowing since he came in. A disagreeable sensation of eeriness crept over him. Annoyed with this sensation—a detective has no right to feel psychic, he reflected angrily, not even a private detective so celebrated as Nigel Strangeways—he forced himself to look round the brilliantly lighted room, the animated yet oddly neutral-looking faces of the diners, the *maitre d'hôtel* in his white gloves—bland and uncreased as his own face, the impassive waiters. Everything was perfectly normal; and yet . . . Some motive he was never

after able satisfactorily to explain forced him to let drop into the yawning silence:

"What a marvellous setting this would be for a murder."

If Nigel had been looking in the right direction at that moment, things might have happened very differently. As it was, he didn't even notice the way Dale's wine-glass suddenly tilted and spilt a few drops of sherry.

At once the whole table buzzed again with conversation. A man three places away on Nigel's right raised his head, which had been almost buried in his soup plate, and said:

"Tchah! This is the one place where a murder would never happen. My respected colleagues are men of peace. I doubt if any of them has the guts to say boo to a goose. Oh, yes, they'd *like* to be men of action, tough guys. But, I ask you, just look at them! That's why they became detective-story writers. Wish-fulfillment, the psychoanalysts call it—though I don't give much for that gang, either. But it's quite safe, spilling blood, as long as you only do it on paper."

The man turned his thick lips and small, arrogant eyes towards Nigel. "The trouble with you amateur investigators is that you're so romantic. That's why the police beat you to it every time."

A thick-set, swarthy man opposite him exclaimed: "You're wrong there, Mr. Carruthers. We don't

seem to have beaten Mr. Strangeways to it in the past every time."

"So our aggressive friend is *the* David Carruthers. Well, well," whispered Nigel to Dale.

"Yes," said Dale, not modifying his tone at all. "A squalid fellow, isn't he? But he gets the public all right. We have sold our thousands, but David has sold his tens of thousands. Got a yellow streak though, I'll bet, in spite of his bluster. Pity somebody doesn't bump him off at this dinner, just to show him he's not the Mr. Infallible he sets up to be."

Carruthers shot a vicious glance at Dale. "Why not try it yourself? Get you a bit of notoriety, anyway; might even sell your books. Though," he continued, clapping on the shoulder a nondescript little man who was sitting between him and Dale, "I think little Crippen here would be my first bet. You'd like to have my blood, Crippen, wouldn't you?"

The little man said stiffly: "Don't make yourself ridiculous, Carruthers. You must be drunk already. And I'd thank you to remember that my name is Crippen."

At this point the president interposed with a convulsive change of subject, and the dinner resumed its even tenor. While they were disposing of some very tolerable trout, a waiter informed Dale that he was wanted on the telephone. The young man went out. Nigel was trying at the same time to listen to a

highly involved story of the president's and decipher the very curious expression on Cripps' face, when all the lights went out too. . . .

There were a few seconds of astonished silence. Then a torrent of talk broke out—the kind of forced jocularity with which man still comforts himself in the face of sudden darkness. Nigel could hear movement all around him, the pushing back of chairs, quick, muffled treads on the carpet—waiters, no doubt. Someone at the end of the table, rather ridiculously, struck a match; it did nothing but emphasize the pitch-blackness.

"Stevens, can't someone light the candles?" exclaimed the president irritably.

"Excuse me, sir," came the voice of the *maitre d'hôtel*, "there are no candles. Harry, run along to the fuse-box and find out what's gone wrong."

The door banged behind the waiter. Less than a minute later the lights all blazed on again. Blinking, like swimmers come up from a deep dive, the diners looked at each other. Nigel observed that Carruthers' face was even nearer his food than usual. Curious, to go on eating all the time—But no, his head was right on top of the food—lying in the plate like John the Baptist's. And from between his shoulder-blades there stood out a big white handle; the handle—good God! it

couldn't be; this was too macabre altogether—but it *was*—the handle of a fish-slice.

A kind of gobbling noise came out of Justice Pottinger's mouth. All eyes turned to where his shaking hand pointed, grew wide with horror, and then turned ludicrously back to him, as though he was about to direct the jury.

"God bless my soul!" was all the Judge could say.

But someone had sized up the whole situation. The thick-set man who had been sitting opposite Carruthers was already standing with his back to the door. His voice snapped:

"Stay where you are, everyone. I'm afraid there's no doubt about this. I must take charge of this case at once. Mr. Strangeways, will you go and ring up Scotland Yard—police surgeon, fingerprint men, photographers—the whole bag of tricks; you know what we want."

Nigel sprang up. His gaze, roving around the room, had registered something different, some detail missing; but his mind couldn't identify it. Well, perhaps it would come to him later. He moved towards the door. And just then the door opened brusquely, pushing the thick-set man away from it. There was a general gasp, as though everyone expected to see something walk in with blood on its hands. It was only young Dale, a little white in the face, but grinning amiably.

"What on earth—?" he began. Then he, too, saw . . .

An hour later, Nigel and the thickset man, Superintendent Bateman, were alone in the anteroom. The princes of detective fiction were huddled together in another room, talking in shocked whispers.

"Don't like the real thing, do they, sir?" the Superintendent had commented sardonically; "do 'em good to be up against a flesh-and-blood problem for once. I wish 'em luck with it."

"Well," he was saying now. "Doesn't seem like much of a loss to the world, this Carruthers. None of 'em got a good word for him. Too much food, too much drink, too many women. But that doesn't give us a motive. Now this Cripps. Carruthers said Cripps would like to have his blood. Why was that, d'you suppose?"

"You can search me. Cripps wasn't giving anything away when we interviewed him."

"He had enough opportunity. All he had to do when the lights went out was to step over to the buffet, take up the first knife he laid hands on—probably thought the fish slice was a carving-knife—stab him, and sit down and twiddle his fingers."

"Yes, he could have wrapped his handkerchief round the handle. That would account for there being no fingerprints. And there's no one to swear he moved from his seat; Dale was out of the room—and it's

a bit late now to ask Carruthers, who was on his other side. But, if he *did* do it, everything happened very luckily for him."

"Then there's young Dale himself," said Bateman, biting the side of his thumb. "Talked a lot of hot air about bumping Carruthers off before it happened. Might be a double bluff. You see, Mr. Strangeways, there's no doubt about that waiter's evidence. The main switch was thrown over. Now, what about this? Dale arranged to be called up during dinner; answers call; then goes and turns off the main switch—in gloves, I suppose, because there's only the waiter's fingerprints on it—comes back under cover of darkness, stabs his man, and goes out again."

"Mm," ruminated Nigel, "but the motive? And where are the gloves? And why, if it was premeditated, such an outlandish weapon?"

"If he's hidden the gloves, we'll find 'em soon enough. And—" the Superintendent was interrupted by the tinkle of the telephone at his elbow. A brief dialogue ensued. Then he turned to Nigel.

"Man I sent round to interview Morton—bloke who rang Dale up at dinner. Swears he was talking to Dale for three to five minutes. That seems to let Dale out, unless it was collusion."

That moment a plainclothes man entered, a grin of ill-concealed triumph on his face. He handed a rolled-up pair of black kid gloves to

Bateman. "Tucked away behind the pipes in the lavatories, sir."

Bateman unrolled them. There were stains on the fingers. He glanced inside the wrists, then passed the gloves to Nigel, pointing at some initials stamped there.

"Well, well," said Nigel. "H. D. Let's have him in again. Looks as if that telephone call *was* collusion."

"Yes, we've got him now."

But when the young man entered and saw the gloves lying on the table his reactions were very different from what the Superintendent had expected. An expression of relief, instead of the spasm of guilt, passed over his face.

"Stupid of me," he said, "I lost my head for a few minutes, after— But I'd better start at the beginning. Carruthers was always bragging about his nerve and the tight corners he's been in and so on. A poisonous specimen. So Morton and I decided to play a practical joke on him. He was to phone me up. I was to go out and throw the main switch, then come back and pretend to strangle Carruthers from behind—just give him a thorough shaking-up—and leave a bloodcurdling message on his plate to the effect that this was just a warning, and next time the Unknown would do the thing properly. We reckoned he'd be gibbering with fright when I turned up the lights again! Well, everything went all right till I came up behind him; but then—then I happened to touch that knife, and

I knew somebody had been there before me, in earnest. Afraid, I lost my nerve then, especially when I found I'd got some of his blood on my gloves. So I hid them, and burnt the spoof message. Damn silly of me. The whole idea was damn silly, I can see that now."

"Why gloves at all?" asked Nigel.

"Well, they say it's your hands and your shirt-front that are likely to show in the dark; so I put on black gloves and pinned my coat over my shirt-front. And, I say," he added in a deprecating way, "I don't want to teach you fellows your business, but if I had really meant to kill him, would I have worn gloves with my initials on them?"

"That is as may be," said Bateman coldly, "but I must warn you that you are in—"

"Just a minute," Nigel interrupted. "Why should Cripps have wanted Carruthers's blood?"

"Oh, you'd better ask Cripps. If he won't tell you, I don't think I ought to—"

"Don't be a fool. You're in a damned tight place, and you can't afford to be chivalrous."

"Very well. Little Cripps may be dim, but he's a good sort. He told me once, in confidence, that Carruthers had pirated an idea of his for a plot and made a best-seller out of it. But—dash it—no one would commit murder just because—"

"You must leave that for us to decide, Mr. Dale," said the Superintendent.

When the young man had gone out, under the close surveillance of a constable, Bateman turned wearily to Nigel.

"Well," he said, "it may be him; and it may be Cripps. But with all these crime authors about, it might be any of 'em."

Nigel leapt up from his seat. "Yes," he exclaimed, "and that's why we've not thought of anyone else. And"—his eyes lit up—"by Jove! now I've remembered it—the missing detail. Quick! Are all those waiters and chaps still there?"

"Yes; we've kept 'em in the dining-room. But what the—?"

Nigel ran into the dining-room, Bateman at his heels. He looked out of one of the windows, open at the top.

"What's down below there?" he asked the *maitre d'hôtel*.

"A yard, sir; the kitchen windows look out on it."

"And now, where was Sir Eldred Travers sitting?"

The man pointed to the place without hesitation, his imperturbable face betraying not the least surprise.

"Right; will you go and ask him to step this way for a minute. Oh, by the way," he added, as the *maitre d'hôtel* reached the door, "*where are your gloves?*"

The man's eyes flickered. "My gloves, sir?"

"Yes; before the lights went out you were wearing white gloves; after they went up again, I remem-

bered it just now, you were not wearing them. Are they in the yard by any chance?"

The man shot a desperate glance around him; then the bland composure of his face broke up. He collapsed, sobbing, into a chair.

"My daughter—he ruined her—she killed herself. When the lights went out, it was too much for me—the opportunity. He deserved it. I'm not sorry."

"Yes," said Nigel, ten minutes later, "it was too much for him. He picked up the first weapon at hand. Afterwards, knowing everyone would be searched, he had to throw the gloves out of the window. There would be blood on them. With luck we mightn't have looked in the yard before he could get out to remove them. And unless one was looking, one wouldn't see them against the snow. They were white."

"What was that about Sir Eldred Travers?" asked the Superintendent.

"Oh, I wanted to put him off his guard, and to get him away from the window. He might have tried to follow his gloves."

"Well, that fish-slice might have been a slice of bad luck for young Dale if you hadn't been here," said the Superintendent, venturing on a witticism. "What are you grinning away to yourself about?"

"I was just thinking, this must be the first time a Judge has been present at a murder."

MacKinlay Kantor

The Trail of the Brown Sedan

The author's own comments on this story: "It was written in July 1933, while I was working on LONG REMEMBER [and a quarter of a century before ANDERSONVILLE] . . . I think 'The Trail of the Brown Sedan' has a kind of sharpness and pungency not always found in pulp magazine material; it is the best of a series of stories which I wrote about the fictitious Glennan brothers."

THE LAST RECORDED WORDS OF Sergeant Paul Van Wert, spoken about a minute and a half before he died, were directed at First-class Patrolman Nicholas Glennan, who opened the door for the three detectives and their manacled prisoner.

"Looks like more Indian summer," said Sergeant Van Wert.

"Another good day," nodded Nick Glennan, and pushed on the bronze cross-bar which served as handle for the narrow panel. When you're convoying a tough guy like Rainy Moper out of a railroad station you don't use the revolving door. No, you use the regular door.—Detective Johnson goes ahead, and the tough guy follows along, locked tight to Detective Cohen's wrist. You, Sergeant Van Wert, bring up the rear. You nod to the cop on station duty and say something about the weather. He opens the door for you, and you all go outside and get killed.

Said the *News-Detail*, in its second extra published about an hour and fifteen minutes later: "The three detectives were jubilant, for Rainy Moper, murderer, mail bandit, and extortionist, had fought a hard battle against extradition. Their arrival at the Union Terminal was unheralded. They stepped from the Pullman, brushed through the first crowds of office-bound commuters, and hustled their prisoner out of the station."

Said the *News-Detail*, in its special copyrighted story which went ticking over twenty wires: "Officer Nicholas Glennan, hero of the raid which wiped out the American Packing Company payroll bandits last March, was on station duty. He spoke to his fellow officers and opened the door for them, then started back toward the lower station level."

Said Antonio Bambasino, proprietor of the Union Terminal Smoke Shop: "I was just looking

out the window when those men come out with him. There is a blue touring car parked close, with another man he sit at the wheel. One detective he get in front. Those two more start to get in back with the Rany Moper fellow. Nobody say a word. Then the guns to shoot they start, like this—”

Sister Mary Louis, Superior of St. Joseph's Mercy Hospital, was only twenty feet away, walking toward the station door. Accompanied by Sister Clementina, and having just emerged from a taxicab, Sister Mary Louis was not expecting to see the very quintessence of murder . . . She had level gray eyes, a firm chin, and her calm voice had only a slight tremble in it as she talked to the police.

“I noticed,” she declared, “that a brown sedan was parked beside the blue touring car. Just as the group of officers got into the touring car, a man opened the door of the sedan. No, he had no mask. He held something in his hands; it must have been a machine gun. A man was hooting from the front seat, too. We heard the shots . . . we stood here, petrified. Looking at those men. No one screamed. It happened too suddenly. Then the brown car went forward across the low curb, turned past the lamp-post, and raced up the street—”

Taxicab Operator Fred Cepak, license No. 1786, got a good look at the men in the brown car. “There was three. One driving, one in the

front seat beside him, and one in the back. Two of them was big, fleshy guys, and the one driving was a little dark runt. Naw, they weren't masked or nothing. And well dressed, kind of. The guy in back pulls up with a machine gun, but the fellow in front had an automatic in each hand. The shots go bang, bang, plunk—faster than I can say it—then the little guy says, ‘Hell. You got *him!*’ And with that they shag-tail outa there. The cops in the touring car are sliding down, dead as anything, all blood and—The sedan door came open, just as the gunmen bounced offa the curb. Then this cop comes out the station door and starts to shoot —”

They were good witnesses, for the most part. Somehow they seemed unusually methodical in telling what they saw. It was as if the blast of gunfire had robbed them of all hysteria. Eight o'clock, on a bright Indian summer morning . . . there in front of the sober railroad station. They were mainly accurate in their statements.

Nick Glennan, with only thirty minutes left before he would be relieved by Officer Canaday, thought he'd see whether he had gained or lost any weight during the hours since he came on duty. He found a penny in his breeches pocket and dropped it into the maw of the slot-machine scales, there in the south corridor of the station.

Then the shooting began . . .

He had his gun out, before he reached the street. As he opened the glass panel he could see Detective Johnson's wet, red face sliding lower and lower in the front seat of the police car. That was enough; it told a long story to Nick Glennan in just two-fifths of a second.

The brown sedan swished across the wide parking plaza, its left rear door jolted open, swaying, a wide gray arm reaching out and trying to pull the door shut. Glennan's revolver rang hoarsely, three times. Then, thinking he had missed, he expended his remaining three bullets in the direction of the gas tank. A huge gray shape tumbled out across the running board of the swaying sedan. Slowly, painfully, it was trying to pull itself back inside as the car swerved around the corner into Comanche Street. Glennan had missed the gas tank, but one of his first three bullets had found a fleshy resting place.

He leaped to the bloody running board of the parked car. People screamed, all around him. Detective Johnson and Sullivan, the driver, had the blank stare of death frozen in their eyes. Out of the red-spattered rear seat came a faint sigh. It was Cohen; he died in the ambulance, five minutes later.

Glennan snapped to the paralyzed taxi driver behind him: "Switch on. Back out! Switch her on, I tell you—" He ran to the lamp-post and wrenched open the big green box. He jerked the re-

ceiver from its hook and said rapidly: "Glennan on Number Forty-three. Carload of hoods shot up Bureau car just now, at this point. Ambulances, squads, Union Terminal. Brown sedan went south on Comanche Street—stop all brown sedans at city limits! Medium-sized car—might be an Olds or Chrysler. I'm on my way—"

A traffic cop was sprinting from the Bailey Street intersection, and another from the east plaza. People screamed, screamed.

Glennan fell into Fred Cepak's green taxicab. "Get going down Comanche," he gasped. Through the open window he howled down to the nearest traffic cop: "Stay on it, Bert!" and the cab went swaying toward the corner, with Officer Nicholas Glennan reloading his gun in the back seat.

He snapped the cylinder home and climbed out on the running board. In front of the Alcazar Hotel a newsboy was out in the street. "That sedan—" yelled Glennan.

"Went south—south—"

There wasn't much traffic. The cab skidded around the left side of a southbound street car, narrowly missed a northbound car, and screeched down the tracks. There were men lining the curb—a few of them. Somebody pointed, waved. Yes, they must have seen that fat gray shape on the sedan's side slowly pulling its wounded self back to safety. "Keep the horn go-

ing, buddy," said Glennan to Taxicab Operator Fred Cepak.

"Okay."

Looooooo, wailed the horn.

A block away from Paxton Boulevard they could see the traffic cop waving his arms. "Slow!" snapped Glennan. He leaned out and waved an answering hand.

The traffic cop's face was familiar, but to save his life Nick couldn't recall his name.

"Brown sedan? Think it's a Chrysler. She just made a left turn, on the yellow. East on Paxton. What's—"

"They just rubbed out a whole carload from the Bureau," Glennan snarled. "Get over on the box for orders." But he was a hundred yards away as he said the last words, and the cop could only stare after him with puffy eyes.

At the top of the hill by the Episcopal Church, Nick could see the long length of the boulevard sluicing away toward the misty smoke of suburbs. Cars, glistening blotches, the wide band of concrete was dotted with their beetle shapes. Between his dry lips Glennan muttered a curse. This would be the same old story. Lost in traffic. Give any car a minute's start, and the driver had a good chance for a clean getaway. *I had to phone*, he kept hurling at himself, *I had to!* Block the highways—get the news on the radio—stop a brown sedan at the city limits—yes, he had to phone—And that extra minute or two,

which brought an ambulance: it might mean life for Van Wert or Cohen. There had been that faint sigh from the shambles of the death car. An extra minute—an ambulance . . . *had to phone*.

"Keep going, bud," he said to the chauffeur.

They raced on. At each of the next three corners, Glennan shrieked to pedestrians or grocery-men in front of their shops: "See a brown sedan? Speeding?"

The men gaped at him. Yes, she went that way. No, that was—Did you say a black car? Hey, Pete, wasn't there a car just went speeding past? Yeh, she went north. Right there. Up that street. Yeh. Going like hell—

With Fred Cepak and the green cab Nick Glennan went hurtling up the cross street. North. A car—going like—He overtook it; a small roadster with three high school girls in it.

"Swing her back," he groaned wearily. "It's the same old story, sure as life. The damn sedan's gone . . ."

They came back into Paxton Boulevard. Sirens moving toward them from the east and from the west. Glennan jumped off the running board and held up his hand. A big, black limousine let its brake crunch; the tires burned in brown ribbons on the concrete. Hard faces, hard eyes staring at him. "Brown Chrysler. Out this way. That's all we know . . . Make for Five Mile

Corners, Al." They whistled away; someone was opening the rifle box and dealing out ammunition.

And so it went. There was a cordon around the whole town in less than ten minutes. The telephones jangled and squawled; telephone ribbons took up the story, and state police began to whine up and down the long, open highway on their motorcycles. Brown sedan after brown sedan—farmers, schoolteachers, radio repairmen, dentists, Fuller Brush men—car after car, they were overhauled and lined up, their hands above their heads. "What's your name? Where you been? Let's see your license. Keep 'em covered, Jack. Car after car . . .

Detective Abraham Cohen died while the ambulance was still seven blocks away from General Hospital. As for Johnson and Van Wert and the driver, they were past any need for hospitalization. And Mr. Rainy Moper, extortionist and five times a murderer, had gone to his own private brimstone pool with all speed. The women who had fainted were being revived in drug stores beside the station. Newspaper reporters, policemen, gabbling witnesses—a herd of men festered around the blue touring car with its shattered windshield and wet leather cushions.

Nobody was sure what mob had done it. It was hard to believe that any hoodlums, however hopped and demoniac they might be, would cheerfully kill four officers in their

eagerness to effect the demise of Rainy Moper.

Nick Glennan got back to the Union Terminal plaza in time to find his brother, Detective Sergeant Dave Glennan, on the job. Fourteen other officers of various kinds were with him.

Before Nick went away to report, he took a walk across the street. He found something lying on the asphalt, near the corner of Comanche Street. It was at this point that the big man in the gray suit had sprawled out of the open door when Nick fired. Glennan picked up the object, looked at it dazedly, made as if to throw it away, and then thrust it into his pocket. Slowly he made his way through the packed crowd and into the wide, guarded circle.

"Four of the best guys who ever lived," his dry-eyed brother muttered to him.

Nick Glennan nodded dully. "Yes," he whispered.

They checked up: block by block and man by man. As the brown sedan passed the Alcazar Hotel, the big man who sprawled through the open door had managed to pull himself inside; a man in the front seat had reached back and slammed the door. The cop at Paxton and Comanche was positive in his identification; it must have been the same sedan, he declared—a shiny one with three men in it—which made a left turn into Paxton Boule-

vard. He blew his whistle at them. If they'd made the turn on the red light, he would have grabbed a car and gone after them, but it was getting on toward the rush hour for city-bound traffic, and any driver is apt to make a mistake and turn on the yellow light instead of the green. Just a split second's difference.

But Paxton Boulevard is mainly a residential street, and in the shuttling stream of cars—in the absence of more cops—the runaway car had vanished. School kids: some said one thing and some said another. You couldn't be sure. It seemed fairly certain that the gunmen had gone north into the new additions between Paxton Boulevard and the railroad; at least they hadn't passed Five Mile Corner.

Eight police cars went cruising through the new prairies, the flat subdivisions. Marble-eyed men examined every alley and driveway and private garage. The human manacles around the main highways were drawn tighter and tighter . . . the teletype clicked and buzzed, phones were a screaming chorus.

First-class Patrolman Nick Glennan came slowly down the steps from police headquarters. "No," he told the clustering reporters, "they've got my story, inside. Go in and talk to the Inspector. You don't want to talk to a damn fool who missed because he was a poor shot."

"Listen, Glennan," said McCail of the *News-Detail* and Luff of the *Tribune*, "nobody's blaming you. You did everything you could—"

Nick shrugged. "That's all right, but I should've got them."

In a gray Packard parked beside the curb were Sergeant Dave Glennan and Detectives Kerry and Horn. "Nick," called Dave.

Nick went over to the car. His corpulent brother was hunched deep in the rear seat with a feather pillow between his shoulders. Dave Glennan's back was still sore, after a famous shooting scrape in March. "All washed up?" he asked kindly.

"Yes. I've just been talking to Inspector Bourse."

"You're off duty now?"

Nick blinked at him. "Yes."

"Want to take a ride?"

Promptly enough Nick climbed into the Packard beside his brother. "Let's go," said Dave. They went, swiftly and silently, up the Avenue.

The young patrolman turned his sad eyes to the huge sergeant. "Where you rolling?"

"I've got an *At Will* assignment, but I keep in touch with the Bureau. If they need me they'll shoot it to us on the radio." He shoved the pillow higher between his shoulders. "Did you show the Inspector what you found?"

"Yes. He said it was nothing."

"That's what I say, me boy. Nothing."

Kerry asked: "What did you be finding, Nick?"

The patrolman fished a small object out of his pocket and passed it across to Kerry and Horn. "A bottle opener," grunted Horn.

"Yes, it is that."

It was three or four inches long—a flat oval of silvered metal with a sharp tongue at one side, and a long handle. *HOFFBRAU LIGHT OR DARK. Drink the best* was stamped into the handle.

"You get 'em with a case of Hoffbrau beer," explained Horn. "Whenever you buy a case, they give you a free bottle opener."

Dave Glennan nodded. "That's the trouble; that's the reason it ain't no clue. There's too many of them around."

"Where'd he find it?"

Nick said: "Out on the plaza. It was about where the car was when the big guy slipped out through the door."

"You thought he might have dropped it? . . . Dave, how many cars go by that station in a day."

"One a minute, perhaps. Lots more in rush hours. I don't know; your guess is as good as mine . . . The Inspector said to forget it, eh, Sparrow Cop?"

Nick turned his bitter eyes on him. "I'm a sparrow cop no longer," he said softly. "Though I was on the park police last March, when I grabbed those hoods who shot you—out there on Acola Street."

There was silence in the car for a moment. Dave flushed; awkward-

ly, he patted his kid brother's knee. "Suppose Inspector Bourse had told you to regard this bottle opener as a clue, Nick. How would you work it?"

Nick took a long breath. "The city flusher," he said, "cleans off that plaza at the Union Terminal every morning. It was there this morning, a bit late—five o'clock, it was. It shoots a powerful stream of water; it would wash that bottle opener up to the curb, like chaff. So the bottle opener was dropped since five o'clock—"

"We're listening," said Dave.

"If a man dropped it from a moving car—or if it got jolted out of the side pocket of a moving car—it wouldn't roll far. It ain't the right shape. I picked it up ten feet from the curb, but to the north of the safety island. And the brown sedan crossed there, headed southeast, cutting across the wrong side of the plaza . . . You see? It was in a kind of no-traffic zone. If it fell from any other car it came from one traveling between the stanchion and the curb, because all traffic is supposed to move outside the stanchion."

Kerry said: "And those cars are few and far between. Maybe the big guy did drop it, Nick—"

"Shut up," Dave said. "Would you call up the Hoffbrau Brewing Company by long distance and arrest them all, Nick?"

The radio began to crackle; Nick Glennan didn't answer. The grat-

ing voice said: "Squads Eight, Nine, and Sixteen. Suspicious car reported on Pearl Street south of railroad tracks. Abandoned brown sedan. Signal Twenty-four B. Squads Eight, Nine, and—"

"Here's Dorchester Avenue," Dave directed the driver. "Down Dorchester to the Paxton cut-off, then left." The balloon tires howled as the car swung quickly into Dorchester Avenue . . . forty, forty-five, fifty, fifty-five . . . the speedometer ribbon blurred. The siren sang in an endless alto.

Kerry, not the liveliest-witted man in the squad, was mumbling to himself, "Signal Twenty-four B. Signal—"

"You dope," said Horn wearily, "that's 'As you approach the designated point, watch for criminals fleeing from the scene.'"

"As if they hadn't fled from the scene an hour ago," grunted Sergeant Glennan. "I always did say that if you didn't have a license number, you didn't have much to go on."

Nick grinned his tired grin. "When the day comes that they make it jail for the man who drives with muddy license plates, we'll have a better break. There was dirt an inch thick on those plates. Nobody got a smell of them. You can't put teeth in an ordinance that carries a two-dollar penalty."

Vacant lots began to flicker past them.

"Pearl Street," meditated Dave.

"That's a block or two past Washington. It's nothing but a big mud-hole there—no houses or nothing . . . Turn right at the second corner, Frank."

Horn asked: "And no rise out of anybody at the Gallery?"

"No," said Nick. "We all looked and looked. The taxi driver and the nuns and all of us. It wasn't anybody ever mugged in this town."

"I say they were trying to spring him," grunted Dave.

"And him handcuffed to Cohen?"

"I know the Chief and most of the others think it was a push-off. But it wasn't worth it: if anybody'd wanted to rub out Rainy, they could have managed it easy with stabbing, after he went to the pen. They never needed to risk all this. No, they were primed to spring him. Maybe they didn't realize he was tied to Cohen. They got rattled, maybe. Remember what the taxi driver said about it? 'Hell, you got *him*!' That was no push-off." They shouted and argued back and forth, above the wailing siren. The Packard skidded into the miserable pavement of Pearl Street. No houses here; the wasteland and marshes spread out, block after block. Rubbish piles, tilted signboards . . . Far ahead near the railroad viaduct, a dark group of men milled around a huddle of cars. Dave leaned out and squinted his narrow eyes. "That's Rhineheimer's squad. Eight."

Anna Watelowitz and Irene Krzanowski were the best witnesses who had yet figured in the case. They had been playing games—playing house, mostly—since seven-thirty o'clock in the vacant lot which bordered Pearl Street.

Along about the time they came out to play, said Anna Watelowitz and Irene Krzanowski, they peeked through a brake of dry weeds and saw two cars drive into the narrow lane from the direction of the railroad tracks. One of the cars was brown and one was black.

Two men got out of the black car and joined another man in the brown car. The brown car went away . . . Anna Watelowitz and Irene Krzanowski picked two tomato cans full of burdock burrs. They went over to the lone man who still sat in the black car—he had turned it around until it faced toward the railroad viaduct—and they said, "Hey, mister, buy some fine popcorn, a big bag for a nickel." But the man didn't want to buy any burdock-burr popcorn. He had a snarly white face and he said: "You dam'n kids," and so they ran away as fast as they could go. They hid in a thicket of marshgrass, where the man couldn't find them.

Finally (it had been quite a long, long time) the brown car came back. It came from the south, and the men jumped out of it hastily and jumped into the black car beside the other man, and went bouncing away toward the railroad

tracks . . . An hour passed before Irene and Anna mustered enough courage to approach the abandoned brown sedan. When they climbed up on the running board, they saw blood inside. They ran home, and told; and Mrs. Watelowitz went clear down to the phone at Poppashveli's Handy Grocery, and called the police.

Dave Glennan sat with his feather cushion against his back, jingling a handful of empty .45 caliber shells in his hand. "Yeh, you better do that, Rhineheimer. Take those girls down to headquarters. Maybe they can pick those mugs out. How'd you like a nice fast ride in a great big car, girlies?"

The little radio chanted: "Squad Sixteen, attention. Communicate by telephone at once. Squad Sixteen—"

Sergeant Dave Glennan did his communicating from the phone at Poppashveli's grocery. When he rejoined his companions, there was a slight smile on his grim lips.

"Let's go, Frank." He slid into his seat. "They got the St. Louis paper to cooperate and send some pictures over the telephone to the *News-Detail* office. They've got 'em at the Bureau now: pictures of four hoods who trailed around with Rainy Moper in St. Louis and K.C."

Even a telephoto picture means a lot. There wasn't any doubt in the minds of the police and detective forces, half an hour later, that they

were looking for Benjamin Farnum, Joe Vitale, and Claude Powers. And according to the two little Polish girls, licking their ice cream cones in the squad room, the fourth photograph was the living image of the man who said, "You damn kids." The fourth photograph was named James Lippert.

"Farnum, Vitale, Powers, and Lippert," chanted Sergeant Dave Glennan as he climbed into the lean Packard. "We're all ready to put the finger on them, except that we don't know where they are."

Kerry swore harshly. "Highway cops! Sure, they'd let the whole army slide through them, if we were after the army—"

"Never mind, Kerry. There's lots of cars on the highway."

"They'll be halfway to Buffalo or El Paso by now."

Glennan looked over at his kid brother, the slim patrolman with the old-young face. Nick was twirling a shiny bottle opener between his fingers.

"That gadget, Nick—"

"Yes?" queried Nick smoothly.

"If you were wearing plainclothes—"

Nick Glennan said: "If I was wearing plainclothes, I'd sure regret that those kids didn't notice the license of the black car. The brown car, we have now learned, was stolen late last night from a roadhouse this side of Midvale, and belongs to a dentist named Holder. But—the black car—those little girls did no-

tice that it had suitcases in it. It's their traveling car, like as not. And when men who like beer go a-traveling, where do they buy their beer?"

"In grocery stores at home, before they start out."

"Not if they're in a hurry. No, indeed. It's only after they reach their destination, mind you, that they feel free to indulge in a bit of a drink. At road-stalls. At hot-dog stands. That's where they would be buying it."

Everybody grunted.

"I'm cock-eyed and I never expected to be taking suggestions from a steer in harness," muttered Dave Glennan, "but we might take a drive in the country. It's a fine Indian summer day, as poor Van Wert remarked before those gorillas got him . . ."

"Highway Twenty-six is the short line from St. Louis and Midvale. Let's mosey out to the city limits and invest in a hot-dog and a glass of beer."

Three out of the first nine road-stalls were all that sold Hoffbrau beer, and none of those three road-stalls had sold a twelve-bottle case in weeks and weeks. No, they didn't remember any four guys in a black car. Yes, it seemed like those guys might have been here . . . No. No spikka Engliss. Sella nice hamburg—

"As a plainclothes officer, Nicholas," said Dave Glennan to his brother, "you're a real stiff pain in the—"

"Don't say it," whispered Nick. "You insult me, and I'll be forgetting that you still got a hunk of lead alongside your chiropractor's delight! And here's another hot-dog stand, gas station, or whatever you call it."

It was a rambling one-story shack at the intersection of Routes Twenty-six and Fifty-five. There were four gas pumps in front and two waterclosets in back. The owner was named Basilio Constanopolus, and yes, he carried Hoffbrau beer. Light or dark. How many bot' you want?

"Not one!" snarled Dave Glennan, and exhibited his badge.

"Listen, police," wept Mr. Constanopolus, "I ain't never sold a bootleg since we got a good beer. What the hell? No, police—"

"Talk to him, Nick," ordered the sergeant.

Patrolman Glennan smiled his sweetest smile. "Now, Mr. Constanopolus, you think hard and try to help us. Did you sell a case of Hoffbrau during the night?"

"There was those man—" Basilio wrinkled his forehead.

"Maybe they drove in with two cars?"

"They have hamburg egg sandwich. Yes, it was so. And they buy a twelve-bot' case."

Nick twirled the opener in his hand. Mr. Constanopolus let his eyes become narrow and somber. "Those are free, for no money. They come in a case."

"They came in two sedans? Four men?"

The Greek shrugged. "Maybe four. It was pretty late they come. They eat somethings; then they go away with beer."

"Now," crooned Nick, "you didn't by any chance be noticing their license plates?"

Mr. Constanopolus said: "Not the one car. I see the license on the one under the light, beside the pump."

Five pairs of hard eyes were on his face. "Yes?" drawled Dave Glennan.

"Not the number. I see the name of what state. All day I count how many state come to stop here. Some day maybe I see twenty-five. Utah, I see—Col'rado, New Yawk—all those place I see on the cars."

"What was this one, buddy? What state?"

"Jefferson," said the Greek.

Nobody spoke for a moment. "Jefferson?" asked Nick slowly.

Mr. Constanopolus shrugged again. "I see," he said.

"But, listen, friend, there isn't any such state."

"On the car. It is a black car, I remember now."

"What color was the license plate?"

"I don't know. It was Jefferson. I read. I have a kids what go to school. He tells me about once there was a great man here in this country it is Jefferson. So, maybe he have a state name' for him, uh?"

Kerry sobbed: "Hell. Lay off, Nick. I got it."

"What?"

"He must have got it mixed up with Washington. It was Washington State license."

Obstinately, Constanopolus shook his head. "I not get the number, see, for why the hell I remember numbers? Just the name, Jefferson. I spell it, uh? Chay-ee-eff-eff-ee—"

"Aw," growled the sergeant. He opened the car door. "Come on, Nick. Get going. Maybe it was Washington, maybe not. He don't know what it's all about."

"Jefferson!" Basilio Constanopolus howled after them, as the Packard crunched over the gravel and turned back toward the city again.

First-class Patrolman Glennan tried to go home and rest, but it was no go. Ordinarily he would have been sound asleep long before this hour. The hands of the little electric clock in his kitchenette crawled past noon, and he merely played with the scallops which Alice had baked for him. Finally he put on his blouse and belt and cap, snatched a kiss from the prettiest face this side of County Cork, and went down to headquarters.

"Beautiful man," he said to the mutt-faced Sergeant Beasley, "we did have a colored chart that showed all the auto license plates in the United States. What went with it?"

"You'll find it tacked beside the Museum in the other room," said

Beasley, "and you ain't so good-looking yourself, punk. I may be within seven months of my pension, but I bet I could still plug a gas tank in a car if I had a full gun to do it with."

Nick's ears were purple. For want of any retort he went into the next room and looked at the chart of auto license plates. He leaned upon a cabinet full of rusty revolvers and dusty blackjacks and perforated stars, and studied the little colored oblongs . . . Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin . . . Most certainly there was no State of Jefferson in the United States.

Suddenly he bent closer to the chart. His ears grew pale and purple once more. From the outer room Sergeant Beasley watched him, sniffing.

Glennan came out. His eyes were very bright, and a slight flush still clung around the roots of his hair.

"Get me the Bureau, will you?" he asked the man at the switchboard.

"Guests will use the house phones around the corner," mocked the switchboard.

Nick glared. He went around the corner to the single instrument in its dim nook.

"Is Dave Glennan out with his squad?"

The dim voice of the Bureau said: "No. He's in with the Lieutenant. Who's calling?"

"This is Officer Glennan, his brother. Can I talk—"

"Sure. I'll get him for yuh."

Connections buzzed and stuttered . . . Dave's voice. "Yeh."

Nick said: "Tell me this, Dave. Do they still think those guys left town?"

"Left town? Say, what do—"

"With airplanes and state troopers and all, tailing them all over hell. What do you think?"

Dave gulped once or twice. "Why—what makes you think they'd lie around here? Sure, it's been done before, but—"

"At night they could make it. We know they went north under that railroad viaduct from the prairies, and there's two good streets, not much traveled, leading back to town. Take a small hotel—an out-lying one, you see. With garages nearby, and—"

"For God's sake," yapped Sergeant Glennan, "have you gone nuts, or what?"

"I'll be coming to the Bureau as fast as a cab can get me there," snarled the ex-sparrow cop, "and you be going in with me to talk to Inspector Bourse. I'm going to tell you upholstered cushion-bellies what kind of a car to look for!"

It was at the end of the fifth-floor-west-corridor of the Hotel De Soto. Two adjoining rooms, 524 and 526. The occupants were listed as the Hot-Cha Orchestra from Louisville. Their names were Morgan, Fry, Adams, and Johnson . . .

"The nerve, the brazen nerve of

them!" gritted Inspector Bourse. "Using the name of a man they just killed—"

He stood beside a bed in room 508, with a throng of officers blocking the open door beyond. The operator connected him with room 524, and a coarse voice yelped nervously at him.

"This is Inspector Bourse," said the old man with the gold badge. "I want to tell you sniveling hyenas that you're washed up. No, hold on—I'll do the talking! Every room around you—on all sides, above and below—has been vacated. There are officers at the top and bottom of the fire escapes, and in opposite windows commanding your rooms. We've got machine guns trained on your doors, and tear gas all ready to let go. You can come out, with your hands up, or you can stay there and take it!"

There was a long, heart-breaking silence. Then the rasping voice began to stammer—

"Break?" echoed the old Inspector. "Yeh, you gave our men a break this morning. Pie-eyed, hopped-up bums: you chopped the whole carload down! Only one of you got a shot in the arm for his pains. Auto accident, you told the chambermaid when she saw the bloody bandages! Remember this: you can only get life in this state—so think it over, and think fast—"

Down the hall there was the sudden *blam* of an automatic. Old Bourse dropped the phone upon the

bed. "So that's the answer, eh?" he whooped. "Let 'em have it, boys! The taxpayers'll foot the bill for damage—"

Five machine guns began to pound.

They carried them away in four neat, body-length baskets of brown wicker. Two officers had been wounded, neither seriously. Up in his temporary headquarters in room 508, old Inspector Bourse patted Nick Glennan's arm.

"Smoke up!" he said to the Glennan boys. "Here—twenty-five cent-ers, and niver say the old man is a tightwad. Boys, I knew your grandfather—I was just a little kid when he got killed in the anarchists' riot, but I do remember him—and I want to say that the old fellow must be very, very proud of you tonight."

"I didn't do a damn thing, Inspector," growled Dave. "It was all the doings of my kid brother."

"And him still with a stiff arm and unsteady shoulder from that affray last March," nodded the Inspector. "It's quite like a Glennan not to whine around and alibi because he wasn't shooting so good, and all of a sudden. Well, Nick—and I hope to see you a sergeant like your brother before you're many months older—I must say that your deduction on those license plates was a slick piece of work. It was aisy enough for us to run the car down, once you gave us the tip. The boys got it in the thirteenth garage they went to, and the rest was aisy, too."

Nick's ears were red again. "I just played a hunch, sir, about them not having run out of town."

"But what good would the hunch have done if you hadn't lined up the car? Sure, it isn't every cop could spot a car on the evidence you had and lead us to the killers."

First-class Patrolman Glennan wriggled, but his weary face was grinning. "The Greek had a word for it, sir! Jefferson, he said, and of course we thought he was crazy. But I went down to headquarters and had a look at the chart of license plates. Just by chance I noticed that Kentucky—you see how it was, Inspector. The Kentucky license was number 345-328—a hot car, no doubt—but it had the letters K-Y, very small in one corner, and the number 33 very small in the other. And all the way across the bottom was the name of the *county*: Jefferson. It's an odd way they must have in Kentucky, putting the names of their counties on the license plates."

"From Kentucky," said Sergeant Dave Glennan, "come fast horses and beautiful women. From the Glennan family comes cops. If you wouldn't object, Inspector, I'd like to offer us all a little drink—just for luck. I'm might proud of—"

Inspector Bourse thrust out his jaw. "Of course I object, Sergeant! It's contrary to law and regulations and the best traditions of our department . . . Ring immediately for ice and ginger ale!"

Sinclair Lewis

The Ghost Patrol

A detective story by the author of MAIN STREET, BABBITT, and ARROWSMITH, and the first American to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature . . . the "stormy petrel" who in a poll of editors and critics taken about ten years ago was judged to have "made the greatest contribution to American literature in the first half of the Twentieth Century."

DONALD PATRICK DORGAN HAD served 44 years on the police force of Northernapolis, and during all but five of that time he had patrolled the Forest Park section.

Don Dorgan might have been a sergeant, or even a captain, but it had early been seen at headquarters that he was a crank about Forest Park. For hither he had brought his young wife, and here he had built their shack; here his wife had died, and here she was buried. It was so great a relief in the whirl of department politics to have a man who was contented with his job that the Big Fellows were glad of Dorgan, and kept him there where he wanted to be, year after year, patrolling Forest Park.

For Don Pat Dorgan had the immense gift of loving people, all people. In a day before anyone in Northernapolis had heard of scientific criminology, Dorgan believed that the duty of a policeman with clean gloves and a clean heart was to keep people from needing to be

arrested. He argued with drunken men and persuaded them to hide out in an alley and sleep off the drunk. When he did arrest them it was because they were sedately staggering home intent on beating up the wives of their bosoms. Any homeless man could get a nickel from Dorgan and a road-map of the doss-houses. To big bruisers he spoke slowly, and he beat them with his nightstick where it would hurt the most but injure the least. Along his beat, small boys might play baseball, provided they did not break windows or get themselves in front of motor cars. The pocket in his coattail was a mine; here were secreted not only his midnight sandwiches, his revolver and handcuffs and a comic supplement, but also a bag of striped candy and a red rubber ball.

When the Widow Maclester's son took to the booze, it was Don Dorgan who made him enlist in the navy. Such things were Don's work—his art. Joy of his art he had

when Kitty Silva repented and became clean-living; when Micky Connors, whom Dorgan had known ever since Micky was a squawking orphan, became a doctor, with a large glass sign lettered J. J. Connors, M.D., and a nurse to let a poor man in to see the great Doctor Connors!

Dorgan did have for one boy and girl a sneaking fondness that transcended the kindness he felt toward the others. They were Polo Magenta, son of the Italian-English-Danish jockey who had died of the coke, and Effie Kugler, daughter of that Jewish delicatessen man who knew more of the Talmud than any man in the Ghetto—Effie the pretty and plump, black-haired and quick-eyed, a perfect armful for anyone.

Polo Magenta had the stuff of a man in him. The boy worshipped motors as his father had worshipped horses. At fourteen, when his father died, he was washer at McManus' Garage; at eighteen he was one of the smoothest taxi-drivers in the city. At nineteen, dropping into Kugler's Delicatessen for sausages and crackers for his midnight lunch, he was waited upon by Effie.

Thereafter he hung about the little shop nightly, till old Kugler frowned upon them—upon Polo, the gallantest lad in Little Hell, supple in his chauffeur's uniform, straight-backed as the English sergeant who had been his grand-

father, pale-haired like a Dane, altogether a soldierly figure, whispering across the counter to blushing Effie.

Kugler lurked at the door and prevented Polo from driving past and picking her up. So Effie became pale with longing to see her boy; Polo took to straight Bourbon, which is not good for a taxi driver racing to catch trains. He had an accident, once; he merely smashed the fenders of another car; but one more of the like, and the taxi-company would let him out.

Then Patrolman Don Dorgan sat in on the game. He decided that Polo Magenta should marry Effie. He told Polo that he would bear a message from him to the girl, and while he was meticulously selecting a cut of sausage for sandwich, he whispered to her that Polo was waiting, with his car, in the alley off Minnis Place. Aloud he bawled: "Come walk the block with me, Effie, you little divvle, if your father will let you. Mr. Kugler, it isn't often that Don Dorgan invites the ladies to go a-walking with him, but it's spring, and you know how it is with us wicked cops. The girl looks as if she needed a breath of fresh air."

"That's r-r-r-right," said Kugler. "You go walk a block with Mr. Dorgan, Effie, and mind you come r-r-r-right back."

Dorgan stood like a lion at the mouth of the alley where, beside his taxi, Polo Magenta was waiting.

As he caught the cry with which Effie came to her lover, he remembered the evenings long gone when he and his own sweetheart had met in the maple lane that was now the scrofulous Minnis Place.

"Oh, Polo, I've just felt dead, never seeing you nowhere."

"Gee, it hurts, kid, to get up in the morning and have everything empty, knowing I won't see you any time. I could run the machine off the Boulevard and end everything, my heart's so cold without you."

"Oh, is it, Polo, is it really?"

"Say, we only got a couple minutes. I've got a look in on a partnership in a repair shop in Thornwood Addition. If I can swing it, we can beat it and get hitched, and when your old man sees I'm prospering—"

While Dorgan heard Polo's voice grow crisp with practical hopes, he bristled and felt sick. For Kugler was coming along Minnis Place, peering ahead, hunched with suspicion. Dorgan dared not turn to warn them.

Dorgan smiled. "Evening again," he said. "It was a fine walk I had with Effie. Is she got back yet?"

He was standing between Kugler and the alley-mouth, his arms akimbo.

Kugler ducked under his arm, and saw Effie cuddled beside her lover, the two of them sitting on the running-board of Polo's machine.

"Effie, you will come home now,"

said the old man. There was terrible wrath in the quietness of his gray-beard voice.

The lovers looked shamed and frightened.

Dorgan swaggered up toward the group. "Look here, Mr. Kugler: Polo's a fine upstanding lad. He ain't got no bad habits—to speak of. He's promised me he'll lay off the booze. He'll make a fine man for Effie——"

"Mr. Dorgan, years I have respected you, but—Effie, you come home now," said Kugler.

"Oh, what will I do, Mr. Dorgan?" wailed Effie. "Should I do like Papa wants I should, or should I go off with Polo?"

Dorgan respected the divine rights of love, but also he had an old-fashioned respect for the rights of parents with their offspring.

"I guess maybe you better go with your papa, Effie. I'll talk to him——"

"Yes, you'll talk, and everybody will talk, and I'll be dead," cried young Polo. "Get out of my way, all of you."

Already he was in the driver's seat and backing his machine out. It went rocking round the corner.

Dorgan heard that Polo had been discharged by the taxi-company for speeding through traffic and smashing the tail-lights of another machine; then that he had got a position as private chauffeur in the suburbs, been discharged for impudence, got another position and

been arrested for joy-riding with a bunch of young toughs from Little Hell. He was to be tried on the charge of stealing his employer's machine.

Dorgan brushed his citizen's clothes, got an expensive haircut and shampoo and went to call on the employer, who refused to listen to maundering defenses of the boy.

Dorgan called on Polo in his cell.

"It's all right," Polo said. "I'm glad I was pinched. I needed something to stop me, hard. I was going nutty, and if somebody hadn't slammed on the emergency, I don't know what I would have done. Now I've sat here reading and thinking, and I'm right again. I always gotta do things hard, booze or be good. And now I'm going to think hard, and I ain't sorry to have the chanct to be quiet."

Dorgan brought away a small note in which, with much misspelling and tenderness, Polo sent to Effie his oath of deathless love. To the delivery of this note Dorgan devoted one bribery and one shocking burglarious entrance.

Polo was sentenced to three years in prison, on a charge of grand larceny.

That evening Dorgan climbed, panting, to the cathedral, and for an hour he knelt with his lips moving, his spine cold, as he pictured young Polo shamed and crushed in prison, and as he discovered himself hating the law that he served.

One month later Dorgan reached

the age-limit, and was automatically retired from the Force, on pension. He protested; but the retirement rule was inviolable.

Dorgan went to petition the commissioner himself. It was the first time in five years, except on the occasions of the annual police parades, that he had gone near headquarters, and he was given a triumphal reception. Inspectors and captains, reporters and aldermen, and the commissioner himself, shook his hand, congratulated him on his 45 years of clean service. But to his plea they did not listen. It was impossible to find a place for him. They heartily told him to rest, because he had earned it.

Dorgan nagged them. He came to headquarters again and again, till he became a bore, and the commissioner refused to see him. Dorgan was not a fool. He went shamefacedly back to his shack, and there he remained.

For two years he huddled by the fire and slowly became melancholy mad—gray-faced, gray-haired, a gray ghost of himself.

From time to time, during his two years of hermitage, Dorgan came out to visit his old neighbors. They welcomed him, gave him drinks and news, but they did not ask his advice. So he had become a living ghost before two years had gone by, and he talked to himself, aloud.

During these two years the police force was metropolitanized. There

were a smart new commissioner and smart new inspectors and a smart new uniform—a blue military uniform with flat cap and puttees and shaped coats. After his first view of that uniform, at the police parade, Dorgan went home and took down from behind the sheet-iron stove a photograph of ten years before—the Force of that day, proudly posed on the granite steps of the city hall. They had seemed efficient and impressive then, but—his honest soul confessed it—they were like rural constables beside the crack corps of today.

Presently he took out from the redwood chest his own uniform, but he could not get himself to put on its shapeless gray coat and trousers, its gray helmet and spotless white gloves. Yet its presence comforted him, proved to him that, improbable though it seemed, the secluded old man had once been an active member of the Force.

With big, clumsy, tender hands he darned a frayed spot at the bottom of the trousers and carefully folded the uniform away. He took out his nightstick and revolver and the sapphire-studded star the Department had given him for saving two lives in the collapse of the Anthony building. He fingered them and longed to be permitted to carry them. . . . All night, in a dream and half-dream and tossing wakefulness, he pictured himself patrolling again, the father of his people.

Next morning he again took his

uniform, his nightstick and gun and shield out of the redwood chest, and he hung them in the wardrobe, where they had hung when he was off duty in his days of active service. He whistled cheerfully and muttered: "I'll be seeing to them Tenth treet devils . . ."

Rumors began to come into the newspaper offices of a "ghost-scare" out in the Forest Park section. An old man had looked out of his window at midnight and seen a dead man, in a uniform of years before, standing on nothing at all. A stranger to the city, having come to his apartment-hotel, the Forest Arms, some ten blocks above Little Hell, at about two in the morning, stopped to talk with a strange-looking patrolman whose face he described as a drift of fog about burning, unearthly eyes. The patrolman had courteously told him of the building up of Forest Park, and at parting had saluted, an erect, somewhat touching figure. Later the stranger was surprised to note that the regulation uniform was blue, not gray.

After this there were dozens who saw the "Ghost Patrol," as the *Chronicle* dubbed the apparition; some spoke to him, and importantly reported him to be fat, thin, tall, short, old, young, and composed of mist, of shadows, of optical illusions and of ordinary human flesh.

Then a society elopement and a foreign war broke, and Ghost Patrol stories were forgotten.

One evening of early summer the agitated voice of a woman telephoned to headquarters from the best residence section of Forest Park that she had seen a burglar entering the window of the house next door, which was closed for the season. The chief himself took six huskies in his machine, and they roared out to Forest Park and surrounded the house. The owner of the agitated voice stalked out to inform the chief that just after she had telephoned, she had seen another figure crawling into the window after the burglar. She had thought that the second figure had a revolver and a policeman's club.

So the chief and the lieutenant crawled nonchalantly through an unquestionably open window giving on the pantry at the side of the house. Their electric torches showed the dining room to be a wreck—glass scattered and broken, drawers of the buffet on the floor, curtains torn down. They remarked "Some scrap!" and shouted: "Come out here, whoever's in this house. We got it surrounded. Kendall, are you there? Have you pinched the guy?"

There was an unearthly silence, as of someone breathing in terror, a silence more thick and anxious than any mere absence of sound. They tiptoed into the drawing room, where, tied to a davenport, was the celebrated character, Butte Benny.

"My Gawd, Chief," he wailed,

"get me outa this. De place is haunted. A bleeding ghost comes and grabs me and ties me up. Gee, honest, Chief, he was a dead man, and he was dressed like a has-been cop, and he didn't say nawthin' at all. I tried to wrastle him, and he got me down; and oh, Chief, he beat me crool, he did, but he was dead as me great-grandad, and you could see de light t'rough him. Let's get outa this—frame me up and I'll sign de confession. Me for a nice, safe cell for keeps!"

"Some amateur cop done this, to keep his hand in. Ghost me eye!" said the chief. But his own flesh felt icy, and he couldn't help looking about for the unknown.

"Let's get out of this, Chief," said Lieutenant Saxon, the bravest man in the strong-arm squad; and with Butte Benny between them they fled through the front door, leaving the pantry window still open! They didn't handcuff Benny. They couldn't have lost him!

Next morning when a captain came to look over the damages in the burglarized house he found the dining room crudely straightened up and the pantry window locked.

When the baby daughter of Simmons, the plumber of Little Hell, was lost, two men distinctly saw a gray-faced figure in an old-time police helmet leading the lost girl through unfrequented back alleys. They tried to follow, but the mysterious figure knew the egresses better than they did; and they went

to report at the station house. Mean-time there was a ring at the Simmons' door, and Simmons found his child on the doormat, crying but safe. In her hand, tight clutched was the white-cotton glove of a policeman.

Simmons gratefully took the glove to the precinct station. It was a regulation service glove; it had been darned with white cotton thread till the original fabric was almost overlaid with short, inexpert stitches; it had been whitened with pipe-clay, and from one slight brown spot it must have been pressed out with a hot iron. Inside it was stamped, in faded rubber stamping: Dorgan, Patrol, 9th Precinct. The chief took the glove to the commissioner, and between these two harsh, abrupt men there was a pitying silence surcharged with respect.

"We'll have to take care of the old man," said the chief at last.

A detective was assigned to the trail of the Ghost Patrol. The detective saw Don Dorgan come out of his shack at three in the morning, stand stretching out his long arms, sniff the late-night dampness, smile as a man will when he starts in on the routine of work that he loves. He was erect; his old uniform was clean-brushed, his linen collar spotless; in his hand he carried one lone glove. He looked to right and left, slipped into an alley, prowled through the darkness, so fleet and soft-stepping that the shad-

ow almost lost him. He stopped at a shutter left open and prodded it shut with his old-time long night-stick. Then he stole back to his shack and went in.

The next day the chief, the commissioner, and a self-appointed committee of inspectors and captains came calling on Don Dorgan at his shack. The old man was a slovenly figure, in open-necked flannel shirt and broken-backed slippers. Yet Dorgan straightened up when they came, and faced them like an old soldier called to duty. The dignitaries sat about awkwardly, while the commissioner tried to explain that the Big Fellows had heard Dorgan was lonely here, and that the department fund was, unofficially, going to send him to Dr. Bristow's Private Asylum for the Aged and Mentally Infirm—which he euphemistically called "Doc Bristow's Home."

"No," said Dorgan, "that's a private booby-hatch. I don't want to go there. Maybe they got swell rooms, but I don't want to be stowed away with a bunch of nuts."

They had to tell him, at last, that he was frightening the neighborhood with his ghostly patrol and warn him that if he did not give it up they would have to put him away some place.

"But I got to patrol!" he said. "My boys and girls here, they need me to look after them. I sit here and I hear voices—voices, I tell you, and they order me out on the beat.

... Stick me in the bughouse. I guess maybe it's better. Say, tell Doc Bristow to not try any shenanigans wit' me, but let me alone, or Ill hand him something; I got a wallop like a probationer yet—I have so Chief."

The embarrassed committee left Captain Lucetti with him, to close up the old man's shack and take him to the asylum in a taxi. The Captain suggested that the old uniform be left behind.

Dr. Davis Bristow was a conscientious but crochety man who needed mental easement more than did any of his patients. The chief had put the fear of God into him, and he treated Dorgan with respect at first.

The chief had kind-heartedly arranged that Dorgan was to have a "rest," that he should be given no work about the farm; and all day long Dorgan had nothing to do but pretend to read, and worry about his children.

Two men had been assigned to the beat, in succession, since his time; and the second man, though he was a good officer, came from among the respectable and did not understand the surly wistfulness of Little Hell. Dorgan was sure that the man wasn't watching to lure Matty Carlson, from her periodical desire to run away from her decent, patient husband.

So one night, distraught, Dorgan lowered himself from his window and ran, skulking, stumbling, mut-

tering across the outskirts and around to Little Hell. He didn't have his old instinct for concealing his secret patrolling. A policeman saw him, in citizen's clothes, swaying down his old beat, trying doors, humming to himself. And when they put him in the ambulance and drove him back to the asylum, he wept and begged to be allowed to return to duty.

Dr. Bristow telephoned to the chief of police, demanding permission to put Dorgan to work, and set him at gardening.

This was very well indeed. For through the rest of that summer, in the widespread gardens, and half the winter, in the greenhouses, Dorgan dug and sweated and learned the names of flowers. But early in January he began to worry once more. He told the super that he had figured out that, with good behavior, Polo Magenta would be out of the pen now, and needed looking after. "Yes, yes—well, I'm busy; sometime you tell me all about it," Dr. Bristow jabbered, "but just this minute I'm very busy."

One day in mid-January Dorgan prowled uneasily all day long—the more uneasy as a blizzard blew up and the world was shut off by a curtain of weaving snow. He went up to his room early in the evening. A nurse came to take away his shoes and overcoat, and cheerily bid him go to bed.

But once he was alone he deliberately tore a cotton blanket to strips and wound the strips about his thin slippers. He wadded newspapers and a sheet between his vest and his shirt. He found his thickest gardening cap. He quietly raised the window. He knocked out the light wooden bars with his big fist. He put his feet over the windowsill and dropped into the storm, and set out across the lawn. With his gaunt form huddled, his hands rammed into his coat pockets, his large feet moving slowly, certainly, in their moccasinlike covering of cloth and thin slippers, he plowed through to the street and down toward Little Hell.

Don Dorgan knew that the blizzard would keep him from being traced by the asylum authorities for a day or two, but he also knew that he could be overpowered by it. He turned into a series of alleys, and found a stable with a snow-bound delivery wagon beside it. He brought hay from the stable, covered himself with it in the wagon, and promptly went to sleep. When he awoke the next afternoon the blizzard had ceased and he went on.

He came to the outskirts of Little Hell. Sneaking through alleys, he entered the back of McManus' red-light-district garage.

McManus, the boss, was getting his machines out into the last gasps of the storm, for the street-car service was still tied up, and motors

were at a premium. He saw Dorgan and yelled: "Hello there, Don. Where did you blow in from? Ain't seen you these six months. T'ought you was living soft at some old-folks' home or other."

"No," said Dorgan, with a gravity which forbade trifling, "I'm a—I'm a kind of watchman. Say, what's this I hear, young Magenta is out of the pen?"

"Yes, the young whelp. I always said he was no good, when he used to work here, and——"

"What's become of him?"

"He had the nerve to come here when he got out, looking for a job; suppose he wanted the chanct to smash up a few of my machines too! I hear he's got a job wiping, at the K. N. roundhouse. Pretty rough joint, but good enough for the likes o' him. Say, Don, things is slow since you went, what with these dirty agitators campaigning for prohibition——"

"Well," said Dorgan, "I must be moseying along, John."

Three men of hurried manner and rough natures threw Dorgan out of three various entrances to the roundhouse, but he sneaked in on the tender of a locomotive and saw Polo Magenta at work, wiping brass—or a wraith of Polo Magenta. He was thin, his eyes large and passionate. He took one look at Dorgan, and leaped to meet him.

"Dad—thunder—you old son of a gun."

"Sure! Well, how's it coming?"

"Rotten."

"Well?"

"Oh, the old stuff. Keepin' the wanderin' boy tonight wanderin'. The warden gives me good advice, and I thinks I've paid for bein' a fool kid, and I pikes back to Little Hell with two bucks and lots of good intentions and—they seen me coming. The crooks was the only ones that welcomed me. McManus offered me a job, plain and fancy driving for guns. I turned it down and looks for decent work, which it didn't look for me none. There's a new cop on your old beat. Helpin' Hand Henry, he is. He gets me up and tells me the surprisin' news that I'm a desprit young jailbird, and he's onto me—see; and if I chokes any old women or beats up any babes in arms, he'll be there with the nippers—see! so I better quit my career of murder.

"I gets a job over in Milldale, driving a motor-truck, and he tips 'em off I'm a forger and an arson and I dunno what all, and they lets me out—wit' some more good advice. Same wit' other jobs."

"Effe?"

"Ain't seen her yet. But say, Dad, I got a letter from her that's the real stuff—says she'll stick by me till her dad croaks, and then come to me if it's through fire. I got it here—it keeps me from going nutty. And a picture postcard of her. You see, I planned to nip in and see her before her old man knew I was out of the hoosegow, but this

cop I was tellin' you about wises up Kugler, and he sits on the doorstep with the Revolutionary musket loaded up with horseshoes and cobblestones, and sq—get me? But I gets a letter through to her by one of the boys."

"Well, what are you going to do?"

"Search me. . . . There ain't nobody to put us guys next, since you got off the beat, Dad."

"I ain't off it! Will you do what I tell you to?"

"Sure."

"Then listen: You got to start in right here in Northernapolis, like you're doing, and build up again. They didn't sentence you to three years but to six—three of 'em here, getting folks to trust you again. It ain't fair, but it is. See? You lasted there because the bars kep' you in. Are you man enough to make your own bars, and to not have 'em wished onto you?"

"Maybe."

"You are! You know how it is in the pen—you can't pick and choose your cell or your work. Then listen: I'm middlin' well off, for a bull—savin's and pension. We'll go partners in a fine little garage, and buck John McManus—he's a crook, and we'll run him out of business. But you got to be prepared to wait, and that's the hardest thing to do. Will you?"

"Yes."

"When you get through here, meet me in that hallway behind

Mullins' Casino. So long, boy."

"So long, Dad."

When Polo came to him in the hallway behind Mullins' Casino, Dorgan demanded: "I been thinking; have you seen old Kugler?"

"Ain't dared to lay an eye on him, Dad. Trouble enough without stirrin' up more. Gettin' diplomatic."

"I been thinking. Sometimes the most diplomatic thing a guy can do is to go right to the point and surprise 'em. Come on."

They came into Kugler's shop, without parley or trembling; and Dorgan's face was impassive, as befits a patrolman, as he thrust open the door and bellowed "Evenin'!" at the horrified old Jewish scholar and the maid.

Don Dorgan laid his hands on the counter and spoke.

"Kugler," said he, "you're going to listen to me, because if you don't, I'll wreck the works. You've spoiled four lives. You've made this boy a criminal, forbidding him a good, fine love, and now you're planning to keep him one. You've kilt Effie the same way—look at the longing in the poor little pigeon's face! You've made me an unhappy old man. You've made yourself, that's meanin' to be good and decent, unhappy by a row with your own flesh and blood. Some said I been off me nut, Kugler, but I know I been out beyont, where they understand every-

thing and forgive everything—and I've learnt that it's harder to be bad than to be good, that you been working harder to make us all unhappy than you could of to make us all happy."

Dorgan's gaunt, shabby bigness seemed to swell and fill the shop; his voice boomed and his eyes glowed with a will that seemed unassailable.

The tyrant Kugler was wordless, and he listened with respect as Dorgan went on, more gently:

"You're a godly man among the sinners, but that's made you think you must always be right. Are you willing to kill us all just to prove you can't never be wrong? Man, man, that's a fiendish thing to do. And oh, how much easier it would be to give way, onct, and let this poor cold boy creep home to the warmth that he do be longing so for, with the blizzard bitter around him, and every man's hand ag'in' him. Look—look at them poor, good children!"

Kugler looked, and he beheld Polo and Effie—still separated by the chill marble counter—with their hands clasped across it, their eyes met in utter frankness.

"Vell——" said Kugler wistfully.

"Sol!" said Patrolman Dorgan.

"Well, I must be back on me beat—at the asylum . . . There's things that'd bear watching there!"

Q. Patrick

This Will Kill You

The crime and detective stories of Q. Patrick, equally well-known as Patrick Quentin, are among the most respected in the modern genre . . .

HARRY LUND LAY IN THE BATH-tub. Above him two pairs of his wife's nylons dangled wetly on the rail which supported the shabby gray-white shower curtain. He could hear Norma preparing Sunday breakfast in the kitchen downstairs.

After twenty-one years of marriage Norma's morning noises were so familiar to him that they brought exact visual pictures. He could see the inevitable cigarette dangling from her mouth while she squeezed oranges on the cluttered enamel table. Norma never dressed on Sunday mornings. He could see her thin body, draped in the old pink quilted robe, bustling about the kitchen.

Every day Harry Lund's aversion to his wife began a fresh attack on his nerves during those moments in the tub. He was a lazy man. He liked his comfort. He liked lolling in warm water, relaxing before the effort of a day at the drug store or, better still, relaxing with the knowledge of a long, indolent Sunday ahead. But he could hardly remember a time when he hadn't lain

there in the steamy, cramped bathroom taut with hatred.

It was strange then to find himself on this particular Sunday morning lying in the same tub, hearing the same kitchen noises and yet completely free of hate. In fact, the sounds downstairs were almost exhilarating. Even the mental image of his wife's sharp, too-intelligent face with its critical black eyes and short graying hair brought no distaste.

This change of attitude was caused by the fact that he knew now that Norma would not be with him much longer.

He knew this because last night he had decided exactly how and when he was going to kill her.

The thought of murder, flirted with at first and finally embraced as a lover, had lived with him so long that now it had become an old friend. In consequence, he felt no awe at what he had planned to do. No guilt, either. He had let himself forget the shabby motives which had made him lay siege to the plain, enterprising girl who had graduated with him from Phar-

macy School and to whom he had never been really attracted. He had forgotten how convenient it had seemed at the time to have for a wife a fully trained pharmacist. He had even forgotten the attractions of her little inheritance which, combined with his, had been sufficient to buy a drug store and launch his career. He had never admitted that it had been due to her drive and slogging hard work that this career had reached a modest success.

He only knew that he, the handsome Harry Lund, was a figure of tragic suffering chained to a woman who had never appreciated him and whom he could never divorce.

Because he couldn't divorce her. Half the drug store was her property. Even if he could scrape up enough money to pay her off, she would never sell. He knew that. The store was Norma's whole life and she clung tenaciously to what she wanted.

Having endured so much then, he viewed murder, this final gesture of rebellion, as almost heroic, certainly as courageous and manly.

And the courage would never have come if it hadn't been for Frances. He realized that. It had been that chance, wonderful meeting with Frances on the bus which had released the true, virile Harry Lund from convention's slavery. Frances was young, dainty, submissive, everything that Norma wasn't. Frances was the type of girl that Harry Lund had deserved from

life. And he was almost sure, if he played his cards right, he could get her.

A pleasurable tingle shivered his thickening body when he thought of Frances.

His plans were without flaw. He had gone over and over them in his mind, simplifying, perfecting, like an artist. From the beginning he had rejected drugs as too dangerous for a pharmacist. There were other ways.

"Harry!" Norma's voice, perpetually husky from a smoker's cough, rasped up the stairs.

"Coming, dear." He was surprised at the cordial, almost saccharine tone of his own voice. He must be careful about that. He lumbered to his feet, water streaming off him. More crossly, more convincingly, he added: "Hold your horses!"

As he dried himself, he studied his reflected body in the steam-stained mirror. Not bad for a man of forty-five. Bit of a paunch, maybe. But a gymnasium would soon fix that up. He concentrated on his face. Harry Lund had always been pleased with his face. Good teeth. Distinguished little mustache. Plenty of hair. Strong eyebrows over eyes that looked straight back at you.

Frances had remarked on his eyes only last week when he had snatched a few hours with her in a restaurant halfway between the city and the outlying suburb where she worked as librarian.

"It was your eyes I liked first. I noticed them right away when you picked up my books in the bus. They're so sincere."

A tiny chill of apprehension came. What would Frances think if she knew he was a married man? How fortunate that, on an adventurous whim, he had introduced himself under an assumed name. Frances was as trusting as she was innocent. She believed his story that he was a widowed salesman from upstate. She would go on believing him. After the thing was over, he could sell the house, the store. He could take Frances away, start a new life.

She need never know.

"For Pete's sake," called Norma. "What are you doing up there? Admiring yourself in the mirror?"

"Coming," called Harry.

He smiled at his reflection so that he could see his firm white teeth.

Neatly dressed, he descended the stairs, thinking: *In a few hours how different everything will be.* The thought was so heady that he wanted to do something youthful, gay, whistle maybe or slide down the bannister. He moved through the untidy little dining-room into the kitchen. Norma, in the old pink robe, was hunched over frying eggs that hissed on the range. She turned, the cigarette drooping from her mouth, giving him that look of keen appraisal which always made him feel transparent.

"My, isn't he beautiful this morn-

ing? How about being useful too and getting on to those dishes?"

Last night they had not washed the supper dishes. Usually Harry resented the unmanliness of having to work at a sink, but that sunny winter morning it almost pleased him for, as he started to rinse plates, he could look through the window and actually see the place where *It Was Going To Happen.*

The house was situated in a suburb, half developed before the war and still raw and unfinished, on top of a steep, barren hill. The house was completely his own. He had bought it with money surprisingly bequeathed by an obscure aunt. It was small, inconvenient, and he hated it. But real estate brought large prices these days. He would have no trouble in selling it for a profit.

As the dishes clattered, his study of the view outside was almost covetous. The snowfall of last week still clung to the landscape. It had frozen again during the night. He could just see the elbow of the sharp s-bend where the road swerved down the hillside to the city. Its surface was smooth with ice. An almost sheer drop slid away to the right. Suicide Bend, they called it. Every Sunday afternoon Norma took the car into town to visit with her married sister. A skid on that curve would mean certain death. Especially if the brakes on the ancient sedan were not too good.

Harry Lund was sure that, this particular Sunday afternoon, the brakes would not be too good.

In his mind he saw himself in becoming black, palely acknowledging the sympathy of the neighbors. "It's terrible . . . like losing my right hand . . . I'm going to sell everything . . . start again somewhere else."

He began to hum under his breath as he piled wet dishes into the rack.

"Listen to him," commented Norma. "Humming. So handsome, so happy this morning. What's happened? Found yourself a beautiful girl friend?"

She laughed her hoarse laugh that was half a cough. There was sarcasm in the laugh, letting him know that she realized how improbable it was that any girl could be interested in a man of his age. An edge of the old hatred pushed up. Norma slammed a plate of fried eggs on the table.

"Come and get it, Don Juan. I guess someone has to feed that body beautiful."

He left the sink and sat down obediently. She sat down opposite him, still smoking, stabbing at her eggs with a fork. She got up again for a house organ issued by some pharmaceutical firm and read while she ate. Norma studied all the new drug literature and, since she had written a couple of articles for *The Pestle and Mortar*, never tired of implying how little he did to really

keep up with modern medicine.

Harry Lund's hand was trembling slightly as he lifted his coffee cup. It wasn't fear. It was excitement . . .

After they had cleaned up the kitchen, Norma settled in the livingroom with her house organ. Under the pretense of chopping wood, Harry slipped out to the garage. He had a knack for tinkering with the car and enjoyed it. He kept an old pair of denim overalls in the garage. He put them on and wormed his way under the car's decrepit chassis. It took very little time to file the brake cable almost through. One violent application of the pedal would snap it. Almost certainly. And he knew Norma's driving as well as his own—and the road. There was no need for the brakes until the corner before Suicide Bend and there Norma always jammed them full on.

He took off his overalls, washed his hands in icy water from the faucet, picked up an armful of logs from the woodpile, and went back to the house.

Norma watched him from black, alert eyes over her magazine. "Domestic, too. All the virtues this morning."

He crossed to the fireplace and stooped to lay down the logs. Behind him Norma's voice came:

"The roads are terrible, aren't they? Think I should skip Ella?"

One of the logs clattered to the floor. He said with an evenness that

made him proud of himself: "She'll be expecting you, won't she? You can't get in touch with her by phone. If you don't show up, she'll be afraid you've had an accident."

"I guess you're right." Norma laughed again, facetiously. "I might as well go anyway. It'll give you a chance to sneak in a date with your new girl friend. . . ."

Harry Lund stood at the kitchen window. Cautiously he had eased the car out of the garage for Norma and left it headed down the road. He had seen her, in her old blue tweed coat, step into the car and drive away. He had run back to the kitchen. Any second now the car would come into view from the window, approaching Suicide Bend. His stomach was fluttering. A curious sensation. Almost as if he was drunk.

The afternoon sunlight beat down on the empty twist of road. Suddenly a car gleamed, Norma's car. He saw it sweep into the bend, topple grotesquely for a second on the brink of the drop, and then plunge over. The sound of wrenched, rattling metal split the silence. A roar, a rumble fainter as the car hurtled down, down.

He turned away from the window. He wanted to shout, to clap his hands, absurdly to call the boarding house where Frances lived and say: *Marry me, darling. Marry me.*

But he satisfied himself with a

smile, the little curled sophisticated smile of an artist who knows that his job was well done.

He went into the living-room and turned on the radio loud so that it would seem reasonable he had not heard the crash. He picked up the house organ Norma had been reading. Soon the neighbors would be coming. He would be ready for them.

The front door buzzer rang shrilly. Harry Lund straightened his handsome red and blue tie and went to answer the door. Mrs. Grant, who lived down the street, stood on the threshold. She was panting.

"Mr. Lund, your wife . . . something happened to the car. It went over Suicide Bend."

Harry Lund put up a hand to cover his fine eyes. "God, no. It's not possible. I thought I heard something, but the radio. . . ."

"All the way down," panted Mrs. Grant. "I saw it. Right from the living-room window. Come."

He was running after her through the snowy streets. At Suicide Bend a little group of neighbors was huddled at the roadside. Moaning his wife's name, Harry Lund pushed through them and looked down. Far below in the bed of the valley he saw the car in flames, a twisted wreck of metal. He also saw two men stooped over some blue, half-visible object a little way down the sharp sloping side of the hill. A third man was scram-

bling away from them up the grade. He came to Harry and pumped his hand.

"She must have opened the door and thrown herself free. She's unconscious, maybe hurt a little. But Doc Peterson's down there and he says she's all right, Mr. Lund. It's a miracle. A miracle. . . ."

It was a miracle. Norma had escaped with only a sprained ankle and a shock to her nervous system. The injury was not serious enough for the hospital, but Dr. Peterson confined her to bed for some weeks.

There was no suspicion of a fixed accident. Harry was almost sure of that. At first the immense relief kept him from thinking of anything else. But gradually he began to realize that life had become infinitely worse. Norma was a difficult patient, demanding constant attention. Her sister Ella, with four children, could offer no assistance. Harry had to hire an expensive day nurse. Without his wife to spell him, he was obliged to stay all day at the drug store, snatching a sandwich lunch behind the counter. With his evenings enforcedly dedicated to Norma, there was no chance to see Frances.

He had called her once, feebly ascribing his elusiveness to a succession of business trips. For the first time, Frances' voice had been chilly.

And to make matters worse, he had lost the car and the amount of insurance was much too small to

buy a new one, even if a new one had been available. Each morning he had to get up two hours earlier to cook Norma's breakfast before the nurse arrived, and then to trudge down the snow-slushy hill to take the trolley to the store.

But of all the resultant miseries, the new, inescapable intimacy with Norma was the most gruelling. The little house had only one bedroom. Constantly smoking, propped up in bed in the pink quilted robe, his wife bossed him, questioning, directing store policy, like a tart-tongued old empress. Something, maybe a half-realized sense of guilt, maybe a tacit admission of her greater strength of character, made him obey meekly. She developed a perverse habit of waking in the early dawn hours and sending him, sleep-stupefied, aching with cold and hatred, to the kitchen for orange juice or a glass of hot milk.

Christmas came and in a burst of seasonal sentimentality, Norma insisted upon a tree in the bedroom. Harry had to drag it all the way up the icy hill and decorate it with colored balls and pretty old-fashioned candles under a barrage of sarcastic criticism. The nurse demanded Christmas off. Harry Lund closed the drug store, cooked a turkey with the reluctant, neighborly help of Mrs. Grant, and served a meal, with gift-wrapped presents, to Norma in the bedroom. Norma was vivacious and, after domestic wine, almost flirtatious.

That night Harry Lund knew that, however dangerous it might be, he was going to try to kill her again.

A trivial incident gave him his second idea. Norma was still in bed a few days after Christmas, but she could hobble around with the help of a cane. When she was in the bathroom, Harry came up from the kitchen to find that one of her inevitable cigarettes had rolled, still alight, from the ashtray and was smoldering perilously close to the low, tinder-dry branches of the tree.

Instinctively he stubbed it. But, as he did so, the idea sprang full-born into his mind.

The Retail Druggist's Convention was giving a banquet in two days' time. Norma knew about it and, always conscientious where anything professional was at stake, expected him to go. What if Norma, under the influence of a sedative, should drop asleep and leave a cigarette alight? What if a fire, a sudden, concentrated blaze in the bedroom, should break out while he was at the banquet? The house was insured. He had planned to sell it anyway.

Some sort of time-clock device was all he needed. His tinkerer's mind solved that problem easily. He brought home a couple of cans of lighter fluid from the drug store. All he had to do was to stand one of the Christmas candles under the tree on some of the artificial moss saturated with lighter fluid. The

candle would burn down and ignite the moss. The moss would ignite the tree.

Harry Lund felt his manhood returning. That night he smiled at his reflection in the mirror.

It smiled back, reassuringly handsome and decisive.

Half an hour before he was due to leave for the banquet, Harry Lund, spruce in a freshly pressed blue suit, heated milk in the kitchen and dissolved into the glass three strong hypnotic tablets. He carried the glass up to the bedroom.

"Thought you might like your milk before I left."

"Why, how considerate he is." Norma's sharp black eyes studied him with mock admiration. "And doesn't he look dashing tonight!"

She tossed her cigarette down on an ashtray and drank great draughts of the milk. He kept himself from watching her. He moved around the room pretending to tidy up.

"Want the window open, dear?"

"On a night like this? You might help me to the bathroom though."

When she came out of the bathroom a few minutes later, she was already staggering from sleep. She mumbled confusedly as he half-carried her back to the bed and tucked her in. Soon she turned over on her side and began to breathe deeply.

Carefully Harry Lund arranged his death-trap under the tree, the candle, just the right amount of

artificial moss soaked in lighter fluid, at just the right position under a dry limb.

He lit the candle. Half an hour, maybe. Or more. An hour. The tree would flare up. The curtains would catch. In a matter of moments the room would be an inferno.

The little candle flame flickered as he tiptoed out of the room.

While he trudged down the hill to the trolley stop, Harry Lund thought of Frances' young face flushed with love and gratitude as she unwrapped a prettily packed package.

"So you didn't forget my Christmas present after all! Oh, *Spring Lilac*. My favorite perfume. You shouldn't have done it. So expensive. . . ."

The telephone call came just after the banquet had begun. That morning he had casually mentioned the banquet to Mr. Grant so that the neighbors would know where to find him. It was Grant himself, announcing excitedly:

"Come back at once, Lund! Your house is on fire!"

Feeling important from the drama around him, Harry Lund made breathless excuses and raced for a taxi. As it slithered up the icy hill, he saw fire engines and a milling crowd outside his house. He also saw that, though the flames seemed to be almost extinguished, the upper floor had been completely gutted.

Warm with dangerous excitement, he got out of the taxi. Someone grabbed his arm and started to pull him across the lawn to the next door neighbor's house. He found himself in a brightly lit living-room. Norma was lying on a couch.

Someone was saying: "The smoke woke her up. She managed to crawl out just in time."

Norma's black eyes were fixed on his face, solemn with contrition.

"Harry, I'm so terribly ashamed. My vile habit of smoking in bed. I fell asleep and the cigarette must have set fire to the tree. . . ."

The top floor of the house had been demolished, but downstairs there had been little or no damage. The agent from the insurance company did not question the legitimacy of the fire but let Harry know that the condition of the building warranted payment of less than a third of the total policy. With the increased cost of materials and labor, it would take almost all Harry's savings to make his home habitable again.

Owing to the housing shortage, it was impossible to find another place to live. For a short, dismal period, Harry and Norma led a squalorous camping existence on the lower floor of the burnt-out house. Then, by a stroke of luck, their tenants above the drug store moved to another city and they were able to settle in the tiny two room apartment there.

Norma could still walk only with difficulty and Doctor Peterson warned that the added shock of the fire should be neutralized by a long rest. But, taking on herself the full blame for the loss of their home, Norma refused to go away or stay in bed. As if in atonement she worked absurd hours in the store, hobbling around with a cane. A few weeks later she collapsed. Doctor Peterson diagnosed a heart condition, prescribed epinephrine, and put her back to bed.

For Harry Lund life had become gray and sour as the ashes of his destroyed bedroom. Twice, when Norma's sister Ella dropped in, he was able to slip away and call Frances, but his excuses were even less convincing and her acceptance of them even more frigid. This was very different from his rosy dreams of *Spring Lilac* and the girl's flushed gratitude.

Vain though he was of his attraction to women, Harry Lund realized that, unless something happened soon, he would lose Frances forever.

As disaster closed in from all sides, Harry Lund's picture of himself as a martyr took on an immense vividness. Life was pummeling him with blows whose strength was out of all proportion to his deserts. And, in consequence, his determination to finish what he had started grew out of all proportion also. No scheme was too reckless for him to consider. Once, at the poison safe

in the store, he made up a capsule of potassium cyanide. Only the weak vestiges of a self-preservation instinct kept him from spilling it that night into Norma's bouillon.

But he kept the capsule always in his pocket. He would touch it frequently during the day. It became the one thing that was on his side.

And then the opportunity came. Harry Lund knew that only a man capable of daring and swift decision would have seen it as such. But then he was possessed of both qualities. One evening Norma had asked him to go around to her sister's to borrow a book she wanted. Just before he was about to leave, she had an attack.

Epinephrine! As he looked down at his wife, convulsively gasping for breath in the bed, the name of the drug prescribed by Doctor Peterson seemed to quiver between him and Norma in great red letters. Nora kept ampules of epinephrine and a hypodermic always by her bedside. Proud of her knowledgeability, she had told Doctor Peterson that, if she felt a new attack coming on, she would administer the injection herself. A double dose of epinephrine would certainly kill even Norma.

Who could be suspicious if his wife, alone in the room, had tried to counter an attack and had inadvertently overdosed herself? This was using drugs, but it was using them with a difference—creatively.

His fine eyes bright with self-

approval, Harry Lund filled the hypodermic from two ampoules. Norma was in a half-coma. She seemed barely conscious of what was happening as he administered the injection.

Scrupulously Harry Lund wiped his fingerprints from the two empty ampoules and from the syringe. Holding the ampoules in his handkerchief, he brought them in contact with the limp fingertips of Norma's left hand and then let them fall to the floor. With the handkerchief too he squeezed the syringe into Norm's right hand and left it where it dropped.

Get out quickly. That was all he had to do, just in case there might be some question about the time of death. Hurry over to Ella's house for a chat about the book Norma wanted.

When he shut the bedroom door, he seemed to be shutting a door forever on his misunderstood past.

Harry had a pleasant talk with Ella, extended through a cup of coffee and a piece of homemade cake. He knew Norma's sister had never liked him, but that day he was so charming that he could see her visibly thaw.

With the book under his arm, he started back to the drugstore. He had given the epinephrine plenty of time. During the next few days, he would need to do some clever acting, but Harry Lund was not worried. His exhibition with Ella had

been flawless. He had always known that he could have succeeded on the stage.

Already, as he climbed the drab stairs to the apartment, he had instinctively arranged his face for its necessary expression—the expression of a husband overwhelmed by the discovery of his wife's lifeless body. He was so preoccupied rehearsing the phrases he would use over the phone to Doctor Peterson that he had opened the door and stepped into the bedroom before he was conscious of anything unusual.

Then, as he looked across at the bed, all traces of reality seemed to be sucked out of the world. Because Frances was there. He saw her standing, young, silent, very stiff, at the foot of the bed. She was watching Norma who lay prostrate under the huddled bedclothes.

As he entered, Frances turned and looked at him. The look was one of unspeakable horror and disgust. He shook himself, staring stupidly. This was in his mind, some vile, cruel trick played by a treacherous imagination.

"Welcome home." Norma's voice sounded from the bed, cracked and weak but with a ghost of its sarcasm. "Your girl friend just arrived. You poor fool, Harry Lund. Thought I didn't know about her didn't you? I've known for weeks. A friend of Ella's saw you together in a restaurant. It was easy enough to find out her name, where she lived."

The words fell on him like hammer blows. But it was the horror of Norma's being alive which completed his demoralization. He had pumped enough epinephrine into her to kill anybody. Could nothing kill her? His knees were like water. He tried to grope for some pattern—anything to removed this feeling of helplessness.

Norma's black eyes were watching him sardonically. "I telephoned this poor girl because I thought I should explain. She's not to blame, of course. Used an assumed name, didn't you? Told her you were a widower." A dreadful travesty of the hoarse laugh came. "Guess you thought you were—almost."

She shifted her gaze to the white, rigid Frances. "Three times he tried. First he fixed the brakes of the car. Then he set fire to the house. And now—the epinephrine. He put in a lot of work to get you. You should be flattered."

Harry Lund swung to Frances. Without any control, words spilled out. "Frances, listen to me. Please listen. It isn't true. I didn't. . . ."

The icy contempt in her eyes checked him. There was a moment of silence, as awful to Harry Lund as a bomb explosion. Frances turned and walked to the telephone.

Her voice seemed to surge up through the silence. "The police. Get me the police." And then: "Come quickly. there's been an attempted murder at. . . ."

Despair brought Harry Lund ab-

solute clarity. He saw, in all its truth, how pitifully bungled had been his great design. He had lost his car, his house, and now he had lost his girl. The police inevitably would trace the damning connection between the three "accidents". Norma was there as living testimony against him and, with tormenting irony, Frances would be her witness.

His predicament was without remedy. Somehow, its enormity destroyed in him the worm of fear. His plan had been a magnificent failure. Perhaps that was what his destiny had always been. A magnificent failure. Hadn't all the outstanding figures of tragedy been overwhelmed in the closing scene?

The actor in him rose to its greatest moment. Frances would see him, at least once, as he really was. He felt exalted, high above the pettiness of Harry Lund, druggist. His hand moved to his pocket and closed around the cyanide capsule.

He walked nonchalantly to the bathroom, entered it, and locked the door.

Norma Lund bustled cheerfully around the drug store which was now entirely her own. Although she had been bored with her husband for years, some vestige of pity for him still remained. But Norma was a sensible woman with little sympathy for a fool. And that had been Harry's trouble. He had always been a fool.

True, she'd had her own moments of folly. She had only realized that her husband had fixed the brakes a few seconds before the car had toppled over the ravine. Her foolishness had almost cost her her life then. But, once she knew he had tried to kill her and would almost certainly try again, she had made no mistake.

She had rather enjoyed lying in bed, bullying him and keeping him from seeing that girl. It served him right. Later, when she had tasted the sleeping draught in the hot milk, it had been simple to take amphetamine as an antidote in the bathroom. While she pretended sleep, she had watched and almost admired Harry's device of the candle and the saturated moss. She had felt a certain pleasure in seeing his house burn too.

Perhaps she should have gone to the police then. It had been a risk, she supposed, to carry the face on longer. But, because Harry was a fool, it had not been a dangerous one. The first sham heart attack, artificially induced by digitalis, had fooled even Doctor Peterson. The second attack, which had been

sheer acting coupled with the planted props of the hypodermic and the epinephrine ampoules filled with sterile water, had seemed to her too obvious a trap even for Harry. But he had lumbered into it like an ox and provided enough evidence to convict him a dozen times over.

Mrs. Grant came into the store for a toothbrush and a bottle of mouthwash. She greeted Norma warmly. Since Harry's suicide, everyone had been particularly kind.

While she reached for the mouthwash, Norma was wondering whether Harry would have killed himself if Frances had not been present during those final moments of his humiliation. Perhaps, by introducing Frances, she had in a way turned from murderess to murderer.

But it was foolish to speculate. Things had gone well for her.

Mrs. Grant was saying: "It's really wonderful the way you manage to run this place all by yourself."

"I do my best." Norma Lund briskly wrapped up the mouthwash. "But sometimes it's hard for a woman all on her own. . . ."

Phyllis Bentley

Author In Search of a Character

Who would have thought that "one of the greatest regional novelists of her day," author of a Yorkshire saga that has brought Phyllis Bentley international popularity and acclaim, would have written a series of deductive short stories in the classic tradition? Meet Miss Phipps, spinster-sleuth, sister-of-the-blood to Hildergarde Withers and Miss Marple.

IT WAS HALF-PAST 2 ON A WARM afternoon in autumn; the passengers in the northbound Pullman had lunched, wisely perhaps but certainly well, and were all ungracefully asleep in their corners, their open mouths and crimson faces cocked roofward at odd angles, like a bed of red dahlias turning to the sun. All, that is, except two persons who faced each other across a table at the far end of the coach. They were awake and indeed their eyes were particularly wide open, for each was staring glassily at a point just above the other's head. The table between them was strewn with writing materials, which, however, neither seemed inclined to use. That they were engaged in some mental travail seemed probable; with each mile the train rushed northward the woman's bushy white hair seemed to grow wilder, the young man's plain face more haggard, the eyes of both more distraught.

Miss Marian Phipps, the novelist, was busy with a problem of characterization which had held up her work for the past three weeks. It concerned the heroine of her new novel, who was just about to emerge from her brain onto the written page. The girl had stuck on the threshold so long because Miss Phipps was utterly unable to decide her appearance. It was necessary for the plot that the hero should feel for her, at first sight, a love equally tenacious, respectful, and adoring; now Miss Phipps could not decide what kind of girl, if any, nowadays could command from a contemporary such a passion. She would probably be dark, Miss Phipps had decided; but was she richly rosy, full of life, with flashing eyes, or pale, mysterious, slender? As fast as Miss Phipps voted for one type, she revoked the decision in favor of another.

On this, the twenty-second day of the struggle, she had as a last

hope booked a seat in the Edinburgh express. She did not in the least wish to go to Edinburgh, but found long train journeys stimulating to the creative faculties. But already a considerable number of miles had gone by, and she was no nearer her solution; she felt hot, tired, cross, and in urgent need of an excuse for ceasing work.

The train took a sudden curve without slowing; Miss Phipps and the large young man found their feet and their papers mixed in consequence. With mutual loathing in their hearts they murmured apologies and disentangled their property. For the first time Miss Phipps observed the young man's notebook; always avid for human detail, she tried to read it upside down. "S-u-l-l-e-n," she spelled; "aged 35, sullen and vehement." At once her large mouth widened to a smile; her eyes beamed behind her old-fashioned pince-nez.

"You are a novelist too?" she exclaimed joyfully.

The young man gave her an unresponsive glare. He did not want to talk to Miss Phipps. He did not admire Miss Phipps. As an object of vision he found her definitely unpleasing. The round pink face, the untidy white hair, the too glowing smile, the bright blue jumper, the lopsided pince-nez moored by a chain to a kind of bollard on her substantial bosom—these clashed with his notions of female beauty; that she was a "lady novelist" as

well was just, he thought, what might have been expected. "Only needs a Peke to be complete," he decided disgustedly.

"You are a novelist too?" repeated Miss Phipps, beaming.

"Certainly not," snapped the large young man.

"I beg your pardon," said Miss Phipps in an icy tone. "From a phrase in your notebook, which I confess I took a childish pleasure in deciphering from this angle, I surmised I might be addressing a fellow-craftsman."

The young man was rather startled. "More in the old girl than meets the eye," he thought. Coloring, he stammered apologies. "I was thinking of something else," he explained. "I'm a good deal worried just now by a serious problem."

Miss Phipps forgave him. "It's no crime not to be a novelist," she said. "Rather the reverse, perhaps, nowadays. And whoever we are, we all have our problems."

There was a hint of question in her last sentence and the young man was caught by it. "I'm a detective," he blurted. "Detective-Sergeant Tarrant, of the Southshire police headquarters."

"Really!" cried Miss Phipps, impressed. "A detective! On a murder case, perhaps? Do tell me all about it. My name is Marian Phipps."

The young man gave a heavy sigh. "I'm afraid I haven't read any of your novels," he said gloomily.

Miss Phipps had a stock rejoinder.

der for this remark; she always replied: "No? You prefer the lighter fiction?" and found it not ineffective. But this time, hot on a murder trail, she would forego her mild revenge. With one plump little hand she waved her novels out of court. "Do tell me about your problem," she urged. "It will clear your thoughts to put them into words. Besides, I might be able to help. Psychology, you know. Characterization. Do tell me. I'm not a very discreet person, I'm afraid; but I don't live anywhere near Southshire."

Detective-Sergeant Tarrant rumbled his hair and sighed again, but more hopefully:

"Will you promise not to write up the story if I tell you?" he inquired.

Miss Phipps considered. "I will promise," she said, "that I will not use the story for five years, and that when I do, it will be unrecognizable."

Tarrant laughed. "Now that's the sort of promise you can believe," he said heartily. "Well, I'll tell you. I'd be glad enough of any help; I don't mind admitting I'm stuck with it myself."

He sat up, flicked the pages of his notebook, and began in a brisk official tone:

"On Wednesday last, September 13, I was summoned at 1:30 A.M. by the local police to a house on the front in the seaside resort of Brittlesea; house called Lorel Manor,

property of a financier named Ambrose Stacey. Large new house, standing in large grounds; newest architecture, modern luxury furnishings; marble swimming pool in rose garden. The call was received at the station at 1:20 A.M. from the butler, who stated that he had been awake in bed, reading, when he heard loud screams from Mrs. Stacey at approximately 1:15 A.M. He went down to investigate, found her in hysterics on the landing, and called the police."

"But who was dead?" demanded Miss Phipps impatiently.

"I went to Lorel Manor and found the whole household assembled on the upper landing," continued the detective with a repressive glance. "In their midst was lying Mr. Ambrose Stacey, dead. His neck was broken. It was plain that he had fallen down the short flight of stairs leading from his bedroom, a large octagonal apartment almost entirely surrounded by windows, to the main landing below."

"An accident!" exclaimed Miss Phipps, disappointed.

"On the contrary," said Tarrant grimly. "A piece of strong string was found dangling from the rail of the chromium balustrade at the very top of the stairs. The end was broken; a similar piece of string with a broken end was found attached to the opposite balustrade; on measuring—"

"You needn't labor the point," said Miss Phipps. "The string was

put there to be fallen over and he fell over it. Go on."

"Mr. and Mrs. Stacey had entered the house by means of Mr. Stacey's latchkey," continued the detective, consulting his notebook, "shortly after 1 o'clock. They had been dining—with a business friend of Mr. Stacey's. The butler heard them come in and go straight upstairs to their room. About 1:10 Mr. Stacey, desiring a whiskey and soda, found that the siphon was not in its usual place on the tray in his room; he went downstairs to find it, with fatal results."

"Ah," said Miss Phipps, "the siphon was not in its usual place."

"The problem is," said the detective: "who tied that string?"

"Who was in the house at the time?" demanded the novelist.

"Mrs. Eleanor Stacey, the second wife of the deceased; Rachel, his daughter by his first wife; Rachel's nursery governess, the butler, the cook, the housemaid, the parlormaid. Not, however, Mr. Stacey's secretary, Jack Thornhill."

"From your tone, Mr. Thornhill's absence seems to have a special significance?" queried Miss Phipps.

"His absence was perhaps rather fortunate for Mr. Thornhill," said the detective. "He has an alibi for the whole night, in Leeds; I'm going now to investigate it. It's only fair to say, however, that it has been investigated three times already. He was speaking at a birthday dinner

in Leeds at half-past 9; I don't see what you can do against that. It's more than 200 miles from Leeds to Brittlesea."

"Mr. Thornhill is young and handsome, I take it?" said Miss Phipps, her voice warm with interest.

The detective nodded. "If you like that varnished type," he said.

"And Mrs. Stacey is also young and handsome?"

The detective nodded again emphatically.

"And Ambrose Stacey was neither young nor handsome?"

"He was 59," replied Tarrant consideringly, "but really I'm not so sure about the handsome. A very big powerful fellow, with penetrating blue eyes and thick graying hair which stands up from his head, if you know what I mean."

"*En brosse*," suggested Miss Phipps.

"Very likely," said the detective. "Mrs. Stacey is prostrate with grief; you'd certainly think she was devoted to him. She is really very beautiful, you know; young and fair and gentle. Early twenties."

"Poor before she married?" inquired Miss Phipps.

"Yes. Poor and county. Expensive tastes, I daresay. And she gets a pretty fair amount of cash by the will," said Tarrant. "And young Thornhill dotes on her. From appearances you'd judge she loved her husband. But plainly she's the first to be suspected." He sighed.

Miss Phipps gave him a shrewd look. "Was the deceased financier what for the sake of brevity we call a gentleman?" she asked.

"Lord, no!" replied the detective more cheerfully. "No more a gentleman than I am."

Miss Phipps surveyed him with approval. "Tell me more," she said.

"Stacey was a thorough rascal, but a dashed interesting chap," went on Tarrant. "Ambrose Stacey wasn't his real name."

"I thought it sounded a little pseudo," said the novelist.

"Oh, you did?" said the detective, glancing at her respectfully. "Well, he had one of those obscure middle-European names, you know, which may mean anything. He'd been everywhere and done everything, and collected a lot of cash in rather odd ways, and I expect also made a lot of enemies. It may be one of them who's bumped him off; that's the trouble, from my point of view. He married his first wife when he was poor, in the middle-European days, and she never quite fitted into his new setting. He was apt to find consolation elsewhere for that, if you understand me; but at any rate he must have been a decent father, for his daughter Rachel simply adores him. The first Mrs. Stacey died seven years ago, and he remained faithful to her memory, outwardly at least, till he married Eleanor. That was just the early spring of this year."

"And Rachel?" said Miss Phipps

thoughtfully. "The daughter?"

"Well, of course I thought of her at once," said the detective. "She's twelve years old and the door of her room is just at the foot of the fatal stairs; and string tied to banisters—it sounds like a child's practical joke."

"A curious set of circumstances, if so," commented Miss Phipps. "A child chances to seize the only possible five minutes when the joke could bring disaster. For in the morning Mr. and Mrs. Stacey would presumably be called by a maid with tea, going *up* the stairs."

"Don't let that worry you," said the detective grimly, "for it wasn't a practical joke. The small landing outside the Staceys' room is lighted by a wall lamp which turns on by a switch at the bedroom door. The bulb had been removed from it."

"Tchk!" exclaimed Miss Phipps. "How shocking!"

"The bulb was lying at the foot of the lamp, intact; therefore it had not fallen but been placed there. Nobody admits removing it," concluded the detective.

"Worse and worse," said Miss Phipps distressfully. "And the child? Rachel?"

"She's a pretty little thing, but delicate; thin and pale and as nervy as you make 'em," replied Tarrant. "Of course, I've only seen her in trouble, you may say; she was in despair about her father. But everyone tells me what a nervy delicate child she is; why, Mrs. Stacey had

moved her to her present bedroom from a more distant one, so as to be able to hear her if she woke and cried in the night. At twelve years old, you know. Yes, poor kid; she's clever but nervy."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Miss Phipps, twitching her bushy eyebrows mournfully. "I'm very unhappy about this case, very."

"Why?" said the detective.

"Aren't you?" demanded Miss Phipps, looking at him shrewdly.

"Yes. But I don't see how she could have done it," said Tarrant. "Five past 1, light there, no string; ten past 1, string there, no light. How could she suddenly leave the bedroom and begin to fidget on her hands and knees just outside the door? What could she say if her husband looked out to see what she was doing? Why didn't she remove the string and replace the light before screaming to the butler?"

"Oh," said Miss Phipps, "you're thinking of Mrs. Stacey."

"Of course. Aren't you?"

"Never mind. Go on," said Miss Phipps firmly. "What steps did you take to solve the mystery?"

"I looked," said Tarrant, "first for the bulb and then for the siphon."

"Very proper," said Miss Phipps nodding. "A good point. You looked for the siphon. And where did you find it?"

"In young Thornhill's room," said Tarrant. "That's why I'm investigating his alibi for the third

time. He says, however, that Stacey came into his room that morning as he was packing his case for his journey to Leeds, to have a last word with him; Stacey wanted a drink, pulled out his flask, and sent Thornhill for the nearest siphon, which of course was the one in his bedroom. A silly story, but in view of Stacey's habits it may be true. Thornhill says that as he returned, siphon in hand, he met Rachel going to her bedroom, and Rachel corroborates this, time and place."

"Oh, I'm delighted to hear it!" cried Miss Phipps with joy. "It's a very great relief to me indeed; I'm simply delighted to hear it."

"But why?" demanded Tarrant in some exasperation. "That doesn't clear young Thornhill of removing the siphon on his own, for a murderous motive."

"I never thought it did," said Miss Phipps. "But he has an alibi. Oh, I am so delighted to hear it, so delighted!"

"What do you see in this case that I don't, I wonder?" said the detective thoughtfully.

"My dear boy," said Miss Phipps firmly, "you said yourself that the method sounded childish. Rachel had the best opportunity of placing the string—better than anyone else in the house; her door is just at the foot of the stairs; you said so."

"But it wasn't a practical joke, because of the light," objected Tarrant.

"Exactly. The fall was quite pre-

meditated," said Miss Phipps, "quite intended. But might it not," said Miss Phipps sadly, "might it not have been premeditated by Rachel?"

"You mean she meant to murder her father?" cried Tarrant. He paused to consider. "Good God!" He struck the table with his hand. "She knew about the siphon!"

"To my mind," observed Miss Phipps calmly, "that's just what clears her of the suspicion of murder and that's why I was so delighted to hear of it."

"Miss Marian Phipps," said the detective, "you're a very exasperating woman."

"My dear boy," observed Miss Phipps very earnestly, "I beg you not to take my criticism unkindly. But, if you will allow me to say so, you're making a great mistake. You're paying too much attention to the mechanics of your plot—bulbs and strings and siphons—and neglecting your human element, your characterization. Why should Rachel murder her father?"

"She had no reason on earth," said the detective. "She adored him."

"Exactly," said Miss Phipps. "Then dismiss that idea altogether from your mind and consider the facts you have laid before me. Don't you see what they all point to? The origin of the tragedy remains as yet obscure to me, because your sketch of the characters is so lamentably imperfect. But one fact emerges

clearly. Don't you see that *the wrong person tripped over that string?*"

"What?" shouted Tarrant his voice was so loud that several of the dahlias stirred and nodded. "How do you reach such a preposterous conclusion?"

"But you told me yourself," objected Miss Phipps mildly, "Mrs. Stacey moved Rachel's bedroom so that she could hear the child if she cried in the night. What do you do when you hear a child cry in the night? You hurry to soothe her. Who, then, often ran down those stairs in the night? Eleanor Stacey. Who knew that fact? Everyone in the household, including Rachel. So much is established fact. I then went one step further and said: What do highly-strung children often feel toward their stepmothers?"

"You mean Rachel meant to murder Mrs. Stacey out of jealousy? Good God! And she's such a nice little kid; I was so sorry for her. How horrible!"

"That's what I thought," said Miss Phipps sweetly. "But don't you see, the siphon clears her. She adored her father. She knew that he might come down to fetch the missing siphon. Would she, then, place the string there just that night? No; for to do so was to risk her father's life, and there were many other nights. Therefore Rachel did not place the string that night. But the string was placed that night. There-

fore we must look elsewhere for the murderer—and how gladly,” said Miss Phipps, beaming, “we do so.”

“Rachel’s only a child; she mightn’t have worked all that out about the siphon; she might have forgotten all about the siphon,” said Tarrant in a tone of gloom.

“In that case the siphon has no significance at all,” snapped Miss Phipps. “For I refuse to believe that either young Thornhill or Eleanor would risk a method of killing Ambrose so dangerous to Eleanor; while if Eleanor was to be killed, the siphon had no part to play. We are just where we were before.”

At this moment the train burst through a series of bridges with a lamentable clatter; the passengers, startled awake, tossed up and down as they took down hats and picked up handbags; evidently the train was approaching some station.

“We’re much worse than we were before,” shouted Tarrant above the din. “I had one clue, and at least the identity of the victim was clear, but now you’ve thrown away the siphon and confused even the object of the crime. If Eleanor Stacey was the intended victim, an entirely fresh set of motives must be found. I wish—”

“You wish I’d never spoken to you,” said Miss Phipps regretfully. “That I can well understand. I really don’t know,” she added with a sigh, “how I came to commit such an impropriety—”

The detective colored and protested.

“—as to interrupt someone else’s cerebration,” concluded Miss Phipps firmly. “It was unpardonable and I offer you my sincerest apologies. How did I come to do such a thing? Good gracious!” she exclaimed. “I remember now! Mr. Tarrant! You’ve been deceiving me! You have omitted from your account of this tragedy one of the characters.”

“I don’t think so,” said the detective, hesitating. “The servants had only been there since the marriage this spring. I don’t think so.”

“But I’m sure,” insisted Miss Phipps. “Positive! Listen. Ambrose Stacey, aged 59. Eleanor his wife, fair and gentle, in her twenties. Rachel, child, aged twelve. Jack Thornhill, in his twenties. Then who was sullen and vehement and in the 30’s?”

The detective stared.

“I read it in your notebook,” cried Miss Phipps, pointing impatiently. “Who was aged 35, sullen and vehement?”

Tarrant, startled, flipped the pages. “That was Rosa Dorlan, Rachel’s nursery governess,” he discovered.

“How long had she been with the Staceys?” cried Miss Phipps eagerly.

“Seven years,” said Tarrant.

The station, an animated scene with porters, passengers, newsboys, and buffet attendants darting hither

and thither like gnats above a flower bed, burst upon them.

"Then there you are!" cried Miss Phipps hastily in triumph. "Don't you see? Don't you see her? Rosa. Handsome. Dark. Ripe. Flushed cheeks. Vehement. Sullen. Involved with Stacey. Hopes to be his wife. The new wife comes. Finds child neurotic and unhappy. Dissatisfied with Rosa. Keeps child near her night and day. Often comes down in night to see her. Nurse knows this. String. Wife trips. End of wife. Nurse not lose job. Indispensable again to Stacey. Perhaps his wife. Siphon a chance, an accident. Wrong person killed. Great distress of Rosa. So great, she forgot to replace bulb and remove string.

How's that?" Miss Phipps smiled.

"So good," said Detective-Sergeant Tarrant, standing up and reaching for his hat, "that I shall get out at this station and go straight back to Brittlesea. It will make so much difference to—er, to all concerned, to have their innocence clearly established." He pulled out an official card and offered it to her respectfully. "If you have any ideas on any future murder problems, Miss Phipps," he said, "I wish you would drop me a line about them. Meanwhile, if there is anything I can do—"

"You've done it," sighed Miss Phipps happily, snatching her pencil and writing: "Fair, young, gentle."



Frances & Richard Lockridge

Nobody Can Ask That

"It had been the easiest case in Captain Heimrich's very considerable experience." Heimrich knew who the murderer was—in fact, the killer acknowledged committing the crime. And yet, it was a poignant mystery . . .

IT HAD BEEN THE EASIEST CASE IN Captain Heimrich's very considerable experience. Five hours ago—five hours and a few minutes, at the most—a man had been beaten to death where a driveway joined a narrow blacktop road in the Town of Van Brunt, County of Putnam, State of New York.

The man who had killed sat across a desk from Captain Heimrich and did not deny his guilt. The man's thin and sensitive face was tormented, and his eyes were blank, but he did not deny he had killed Robert Ashton, a man in his middle thirties who had spent the previous afternoon on a golf course.

The previous afternoon had been surprisingly warm for mid-spring. Now, at a little before one on Monday morning, it was still surprisingly warm—"unseasonably warm," the Weather Bureau called it. A window of the second-floor office in the Town House, which Heimrich had borrowed, was partially open, and the air which came through it was almost like summer air. This uncharacteristically pleas-

ant weather was one of several things which Malcolm Burns, retired cartoonist, had not counted on. For one reason and another, Captain Heimrich of the New York State Police was rather sorry for Malcolm Burns, although Heimrich knows of no excuse for murder.

"I admit killing him," Burns said, and his voice was steady—painfully steady. "What more do you want?"

A statement was wanted. A statement is always wanted. It would be taken down, transcribed, and Mr. Burns would be asked to sign it. The third man in the room was a police stenographer. Mr. Burns was aware of that.

"I killed him," Burns said. "I beat him over the head with this." He touched the heavy cane which rested against the chair he sat in. "I said, 'Walked down to meet you, old man,' and he said something—I don't remember what—and started up the drive ahead of me. I hit him hard. Then I hit him a couple more times to make sure. That's a statement. I'll sign that, Captain."

Momentarily, Captain Heimrich closed the bright blue eyes set wide in a square face. He said, somewhat sadly, "Now, Mr. Burns," and added that they needed more than that. Then he said, "Because you thought he was in love with your wife?"

"Does Lydia know yet?" Malcolm Burns asked. "Has somebody told her?"

"Yes," Heimrich said. "Somebody's running her up from town."

Burns nodded, to show he had heard. Then he said, "I'd known he was in love with her for quite some time. She's—she's easy to fall in love with. But . . ." He stopped. His face worked. "She was beginning to fall in love with him," he said. "She didn't know it herself but—I could hear it in her voice. When she spoke of him."

"Only that?" Heimrich said.

"I know Lyddie," Burns said. "Don't you think I know her? Her voice—she can't hide things in her voice. She's not that kind. And . . ." Again he stopped. Heimrich waited. "She's the straightest thing in the world," Burns said, and spoke very slowly, in a very steady voice. "When—when she realized she loved him, she'd come to me and tell me. And—she'd go away. Get a divorce and . . ." Once more he stopped.

"She was all I had left," he said, and spoke as if everything were dead around him. "What more?"

"From the beginning," Heimrich said. "Start with Saturday. You'd

arranged for your wife to go to New York to see her mother. You agreed to call Ashton and tell him the usual Sunday evening supper was off. You didn't call him. You gave your housekeeper Sunday off."

"She's always off Sunday," Burns said. "Most of them are, around here. She made a casserole to go into the oven for Sunday supper. I'd been out walking—walking up and down the drive—and came up to the house just as she was leaving. She told me where the casserole was and that everything was finished up, and that she'd remembered to wind the clock and set it."

"She told you that she had set the clock?"

"It runs slow," Burns said. "Every Saturday she winds it and sets it. Every Saturday she tells us she has."

"Go on," Heimrich said. "On Sunday? Before you went down the drive to meet Mr. Ashton?"

Burns did not see what difference it made now. But—if Heimrich did—he had waited until it was time. He had had breakfast. He had simply sat there and played some records. And—he had been lonely. Was that a satisfaction to Heimrich? He had been lonely. But, all he had done was to wait until it was time. Everything else had been done.

Heimrich said he had "arranged" for his wife to go to New York. That was not true; was not, at any rate simply true. She had had her

mother on her mind; had said often that she ought—really ought—to go and spend a day with her. “I encouraged her,” Burns said. “That was all. Suggested she go some Saturday afternoon, stay until Monday. She picked last Saturday. But one weekend would have been as good as another. He came every Sunday, or almost. Had for, oh, about a year.”

The even voice faltered, momentarily. Heimrich waited.

Malcolm Burns had fixed himself lunch. Then he had gone out onto the terrace and sat in the sun—faced the afternoon sun. From the terrace one could . . . He interrupted himself. “You’ve seen it.”

Heimrich had seen it. He had driven up the narrow, turning driveway, bordered close by tall evergreens. He had come out into the clearing where the Burns house hugged its hilltop. He had seen the terrace, which was to the west of the house. From the terrace, one could look far across the Hudson; could look along a wide vista cut through trees; could see the river far below and the hills—tinted now with spring—beyond. The sun had just set behind the Palisades when Heimrich went to the house, and the sky flamed there.

“We cut the trees,” Burns said, as if Heimrich had spoken. “Mostly by ourselves, Lyddie and I. So that we could sit on the terrace and look across the river. That was one reason we built there. So that . . .”

He stopped. He said Heimrich couldn’t; he supposed, be less interested. He said he had sat on the terrace; in the sun. It was nobody’s business what he had thought about. After a time he had gone back in and changed into dark clothes. After that, he had made himself a drink. “One drink,” he said. “I was getting a little jumpy.” He had turned the record player on again, at low volume, and listened to music and—waited. He found that time passed very slowly. “You’d think it wouldn’t,” he said. “But it did.”

The clock struck, and he counted its striking. It struck six, and he went back to his chair and waited, listening to the soft music. He found that the music, instead of soothing, became a torment. “We listened to music a good deal, Lyddie and I,” he said. “Especially the last couple of years.” He turned the player off and merely sat, waiting. The clock struck the half-hour, and then he got up and went around the house turning on lights.

“People can see the house from the road,” Burns said. “At a certain point. I didn’t want him to see it dark and think the plans were changed.”

He put the casserole in the oven, then. He got his cane and sat in a chair near the door. The time passed so slowly that he had a sudden conviction the clock had stopped, and made himself listen intently and heard the clock tick-

ing. "It's amazing what you can hear if you try," he said. "Too much, sometimes. A note in a voice and . . ." He did not finish. He said, across the desk to Heimrich, "What use is this to you?"

"Go on," Heimrich said. "We like to get things clear."

Finally, Burns went on, the clock struck seven. He waited until it struck the half hour, and then a few minutes more. Ashton was due at a quarter of eight. He did not want to have to wait "down there" too long. But he wanted to be in good time.

"You didn't think of the Knights?" Heimrich asked him.

"Sure I thought of them," Burns said. "I'm not a fool, Captain. I had the whole thing worked out. They'd be inside, with the lights on. You look out of a lighted room into the dark, and what do you see? Not a thing. Not even through that big window of theirs."

"That's true, naturally," Heimrich said, and remembered the wide "picture" window of John Knight's house—and the house itself not far back from the blacktop road, opposite the entrance of the Burns driveway. He remembered the terrace which ran along the front of the Knight house, and the terrace furniture the Knights had got out early this season, because it had turned so unusually warm. "You thought it would be blamed on these hoodlums who've been going around?"

"Why not?" Burns said. "It

wouldn't be the first time young gangsters have killed a man. But I told you—I didn't care who you pinned it on. Or tried to pin it on. That was the beauty of it. It was so damned simple. Where would you have started? What would you have had to go on?"

"All right," Heimrich said. "Go ahead."

Burns had walked down the driveway, which was like a tunnel, walled and topped by trees. At the foot of the driveway he had had to wait only a few minutes, and then he heard Ashton's familiar steps on the road surface. "He always," Burns said, "walked as if he owned the earth." He greeted Ashton, and was greeted in return. Ashton started up the drive, and Burns brought the heavy cane up and down again.

He felt the shock of the impact through the cane and then, in the same instant, the—it was a kind of "give"—as Ashton's skull was broken. He stooped over Ashton, lying on the graveled drive, and made sure. But to make more than sure he struck again—struck twice, flailing downward with the cane. Then he walked back up the drive to his house and, when he was there, washed the cane off under a tap in the kitchen and dried it with tissue and flushed the paper down a toilet.

"You didn't hear anything?" Heimrich asked him.

"A man shouting," Burns said. "Oh—I know. But Knight is al-

ways yelling at that dog of his."

He waited a few minutes more, and then telephoned to Ashton's house and asked the housekeeper whether Ashton was on his way—said Ashton was late, and that it wasn't like him to be late. He was told that Ashton had left some time before.

He had planned that, after waiting a little, he would walk down the driveway and find the body. But—

"Ten or fifteen minutes and you came," Burns said to Heimrich, and his face worked and it was, evidently, an effort to keep his voice steady. "You must have been close by."

"At the Old Stone Inn," Heimrich said. "They got me there a few minutes after Mr. Knight called and said what he had seen—what they'd all seen—from the terrace."

"I had quite an audience," Malcolm Burns said, and now he made no effort to keep bitterness—the bitterness of defeat—out of his voice. "The Knights and their guests. Any other—"

"Yes," Heimrich said. "Any other day than the last Sunday in April, Mr. Burns. The day we start daylight saving hereabouts. So that, when the clock struck seven, it was only six by what people call sun time. And the sun was well up—didn't set for almost an hour. It was still bright day when you killed him at a quarter of eight." He paused and looked at the twisting features of the man across from him, and at the still, blank eyes. "Your housekeeper," Captain Heimrich said, "told you she had set the clock."

"I explained about—" Burns began, and then spread his hands hopelessly. His face, with that gesture, seemed somehow to fall apart. He began groping for his cane, like an old, blind man. But he was not old. He was not over forty.

"She was my eyes," he said, and spoke in a low, dazed voice. "If she went away . . ." He did not, he could not, immediately finish. His groping fingers found the heavy cane. "You can't ask a man to lose his eyes twice," Burns said. "Nobody can ask that."

Fredric Brown

The Cream of the Jest

An extremely clever story about an actor who was a paragon of blackmailers—"a has-been who never really was and who certainly never will be" . . .

THE BAR IN FRONT OF HIM WAS wet and sloppy. Sir Charles Hanover Gresham carefully rested his forearms on the raised dry rim of it and held the folded copy of *Stagecraft* that he was reading up out of the puddles. His forearms, not his elbows; when you have but one suit and it is getting threadbare you remember not to rest your elbows on a bar or a table. Just as, when you sit, you always pull up the trouser legs an inch or two to keep the knees from becoming baggy. When you are an actor you remember those things. Even if you're a has-been who never really was and who certainly never will be, living—barely—off blackmail, drinking beer in a Bowery bar, hung-over and miserable, at two o'clock on a cool fall afternoon, you remember.

But you always read *Stagecraft*.

He was reading it now. "Gambler Angels Meller," a one-column headline told him; he read even that, casually. Then he came to a name in the second paragraph, the name of the playwright. One of his eyebrows rose a full millimeter at

that name. Wayne Campbell, his *patron*, had written another play. The first in three full years. Not that that mattered to Wayne, for his last play and his second last had both sold to Hollywood for very substantial sums. New plays or no, Wayne Campbell would keep on eating caviar and drinking champagne. And new plays or no, he, Sir Charles Hanover Gresham, would keep on eating hamburger sandwiches and drinking beer. It was the only thing he was ashamed of—not the hamburgers and the beer, but the means by which he was forced to obtain them. Blackmail is a nasty word; he hated it.

But now, possibly, just possibly—

Even that chance was worth celebrating. He looked at the bar in front of him; fifteen cents lay there. He took his last dollar bill from his pocket and put it down on the one dry spot on the bar.

"Mac!" he said.

Mac, the bartender, who had been gazing into space, came over. He asked, "The same, Charlie?"

"Not the same, Mac. This time the amber fluid."

"You mean whiskey?"

"I do indeed. One for you and one for me. *Ah, with the Grape my fading life provide . . .*"

Mac poured two shots and refilled Sir Charles's beer glass. "Chaser's on me."

Sir Charles raised his shot glass and looked past it, not at Mac the bartender but at his own reflection in the smeary backbar mirror. A quite distinguished-looking gentleman stared back at him. They smiled at one another; then they both looked at Mac, one of them from the front, the other from the back.

"To your excellent health, Mac," they said—Sir Charles aloud and his reflection silently. The raw, cheap whiskey burned a warm and grateful path.

Mac looked over and said, "You're a screwy guy, Charlie, but I like you. Sometimes I think you really are a knight; I dunno."

"*A Hair perhaps divides the False and True,*" said Sir Charles. "Do you by any chance know Omar?"

"Omar who?"

"The tentmaker. A great old boy, Mac; he's got me down to a T. Listen to this:

*"After a momentary silence spake
Some Vessel of a more ungainly
Make:*

*'They sneer at me from leaning
all awry:*

*What! did the Hand then of the
Potter shake?'"*

Mac said, "I don't get it."

Sir Charles sighed. "Am I all awry, Mac? Seriously, I'm going to phone and make an important appointment, maybe. Do I look all right or am I leaning all awry? Oh, Lord, Mac, I just thought what that would make me. Ham awry."

"You look all right, Charlie."

"But, Mac, you missed that horrible pun. Ham awry. Ham on rye."

"You mean you want a sandwich?"

Sir Charles smiled gently. He said, "I'll change my mind, Mac; I'm not hungry after all. But perhaps the exchequer will stand another drink."

It stood another drink. Mac went to another customer.

The haze was coming, the gentle haze. The figure in the backbar mirror smiled at him as though they had a secret in common. And they had, but the drinks were helping them to forget it—at least to shove it to the back of the mind. Now, through the gentle haze that was not really drunkenness, that figure in the mirror did not say, "You're a fraud and a failure, Sir Charles, living on blackmail," as it so often and so accusingly had said. No, now it said, "You're a fine fellow, Sir Charles; a little down on your luck for these last few—let us not say how many—years. Things are going to change. You'll walk the boards again; once more you'll hold audiences in the palm of your hand. You're an actor, man."

He downed his second shot and then, sipping his beer slowly, he reread the article in *Stagecraft* headlined "Gambler Angels Meller."

There wasn't much detail, but there was enough. The name of the melodrama was *The Perfect Crime*, which didn't matter; the author was Wayne Campbell, which did matter. Wayne could try to get him into the cast; Wayne would try. And not because of threat of blackmail; quite the converse.

And, although this didn't matter either, the play was being backed by Nick Corianos. Maybe, come to think of it, that did matter. Nick Corianos was a plunger, a real big-shot. *The Perfect Crime* wouldn't lack for funds, not if Nick was backing it. You've heard of Nick Corianos. Legend has it that he once dropped half a million dollars in a single 40-hour session of poker, and laughed about it. Legend says many unpleasant things about him, too, but the police have never proved them.

Sir Charles smiled at the thought: Nick Corianos getting away with *The Perfect Crime*. He wondered if that thought had come to Corianos, if it was part of his reason for backing this particular play. One of life's little pleasures, thinking such things. Posing, posturing, knowing you were ridiculous, knowing you were a cheat and a failure, you live on the little pleasures—and the big dreams.

Still smiling gently, he went into

the phone booth at the front of the tavern near the door. He dialed Wayne Campbell's number. He said, "Wayne? This is Charles Gresham."

"Yes?"

"May I see you—at your office?"

"Now listen, Gresham, if it's more money, no. You've got some coming in three days and you agreed, definitely agreed, that if I gave you that amount regularly, you'd—"

"Wayne, it's not money. The opposite, my dear boy. I can save you money."

"How?" He was cold, suspicious.

"You'll be casting for your new play. Oh, I know you don't do the actual casting yourself, but a word from you, Wayne, would get me a part. Even a walk-on, Wayne, anything, and I won't bother you again."

"While the play runs, you mean?"

Sir Charles cleared his throat. He said, regretfully, "Of course, while the play runs. But if it's a play of yours, Wayne, it may run a long time."

"You'd get drunk and get fired before it was out of rehearsal."

"No. I don't drink when I'm working, Wayne. What have you to lose? I won't disgrace you. You know I can act. Don't you?"

"Yes." It was grudging, but it was a yes. "All right—you've got a point if it'll save me money. And it's a cast of fourteen; I suppose I could—"

"I'll be right over, Wayne. And thanks, thanks a lot."

He left the booth and went outside, quickly, into the cool, crisp air, before he'd be tempted to take another drink to celebrate the fact that he would be on the boards again. *Might be*, he corrected himself quickly. Even with help from Wayne Campbell, it was no certainty.

He shivered a little, walking to the subway. He'd have to buy himself a coat out of his next—allowance. It was turning colder; he shivered more as he walked from the subway to Wayne's office. But Wayne's office was warm, if Wayne wasn't. Wayne sat there staring.

Finally he said, "You don't look the part, Gresham. Damn it all, you don't look it. And that's funny."

Sir Charles said, "I don't know why it's funny, Wayne. But looking the part means nothing. There is such a thing as make-up, such a thing as acting. A true actor can look any part."

Surprisingly, Wayne was chuckling with amusement.

He said, "You don't know it's funny, Gresham, but it is. I've got two possibilities you can try for. One of them is practically a walk-on; you'd get three short speeches. The other—"

"Yes?"

"It is funny, Gresham. There's a blackmailer in my play. And damn it all, you are one; you've been living off me for five years now."

Sir Charles said, "Very reasonably, Wayne. You must admit my demands are modest, and that I've never increased them."

"You are a very paragon of blackmailers, Gresham. I assure you it's a pleasure—practically. But the cream of the jest would be letting you play the blackmailer in my play so that for the duration of it I wouldn't be paying you blackmail. And it's a fairly strong supporting role; it'd pay you a lot more than you have been asking from me. But—"

"But what?"

"Damned if you look it! I don't think you'd be convincing as a blackmailer. You're always so apologetic and ashamed about it—and yes, I know, you wouldn't be doing it if you could earn your eats—and drinks—any other way. But the blackmailer in my play is a fairly hardboiled mug. Has to be. People wouldn't believe in anybody like you, Gresham."

"Give me a chance at it, Wayne. Let me read the part."

"I think we'd better settle for the smaller role. You said you'd settle for a walk-on, and this other part is little better than that. But you're just not a heavy, Gresham."

"At least let me read it."

Wayne Campbell shrugged. He pointed to a bound manuscript on a corner of his desk, nearer to Sir Charles than to him. He said, "Okay, the role is Richter. Your biggest scene, your longest and most dramatic speech, is about two pages

back of the first-act curtain. Go ahead and read it to me."

Sir Charles's fingers trembled just slightly with eagerness as he found the first-act curtain and thumbed back. He said, "Let me read it to myself first, Wayne, to get the sense of it." It was a longish speech, but he read it rapidly twice and he had it; memorizing had always been easy for him. He put down the manuscript and thought an instant to put himself in the mood.

His face grew cold and hard, his eyes hooded. He stood up and leaned his hands on the desk, caught Wayne's eyes with his own, and poured on the speech, his voice cold and precise and deadly.

And it was balm to his actor's soul that Wayne's eyes widened as he listened to it. He said, "I'll be damned. You *can* act. Okay, I'll try to get you the role. I didn't think you had it in you, but you have. Only if you cross me up by drinking—"

"I won't." Sir Charles sat down; he had been calm and cold during the speech. Now he was trembling again and he didn't want it to show. Wayne might think it was drink or poor health, and not know that it was eagerness and excitement. This might be the start of it, the come-back he'd hoped for—he hated to think how long it had been that he'd been hoping. But one good supporting role, and in a Wayne Campbell play that might have a long run, and he'd be on his way.

Producers would notice him and there'd be another and slightly better role when this play ended, and a better one after that.

He knew he was kidding himself, but the excitement, the *hope* was there. It went to his head like stronger drink than any tavern served.

Maybe he'd even have a chance to play again in a Shakespeare revival, and there are always Shakespeare revivals. He knew most of every major Shakespearean role, although he'd played only minor ones. Macbeth, that great speech of Macbeth's—

He said, "I wish you were Shakespeare, Wayne. I wish you were just writing Macbeth. Beautiful stuff in there, Wayne. Listen:

*"Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and
tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day
to day,
To the last syllable of recorded
time;
And all of our yesterdays have
lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out,
out—"*

"Brief candle, and so on. Sure, it's beautiful and I wish, too, that I were Shakespeare, Gresham. But I haven't got all day to listen."

Sir Charles sighed and stood up. Macbeth had stood him in good stead; he wasn't trembling any more. He said, "Nobody ever has time to listen. Well, Wayne, thanks."

"Wait a minute. You sound as though I'm doing the casting and have already signed you. I'm only the first hurdle. We're going to let the director do the actual casting, with Corianos's and my advice and consent, but we haven't hired a director yet. I think it's going to be Dixon, but it isn't 100 per cent sure yet."

"Shall I go talk to him? I know him slightly."

"Ummm—not till it's definite. If I send you to him, he'll be sure we are hiring him, and maybe he'll want more money. Not that it won't take plenty to get him anyway. But you can talk to Nick; he's putting up the money and he'll have a say in the casting."

"Sure, I'll do that, Wayne."

Wayne reached for his wallet. "Here's twenty bucks," he said. "Straighten out a little; get a shave and a haircut and a clean shirt. Your suit's all right. Maybe you should have it pressed. And listen—"

"Yes?"

"That twenty's no gift. It comes out of your next."

"More than fair. How shall I handle Corianos? Sell him on the idea that I can handle the part, as I did you?"

Wayne Campbell grinned. He said, *"Speak the speech, I pray you, as you have pronounced it to me, trippingly on the tongue; but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the towncrier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the*

air—I can recite Shakespeare, too."

"We'll not mention how." Sir Charles smiled. "Thanks a million, Wayne. Goodbye."

He got the haircut, which he needed, and the shave, which he didn't really need—he had shaved that morning. He bought a new white shirt and had his shoes shined and his suit pressed. He had his soul lifted with three Manhattans in a respectable bar; three, sipped slowly, and no more. And he ate—the three cherries from the Manhattans.

The backbar mirror wasn't smeary. It was blue glass, though, and it made him look sinister. He smiled a sinister smile at his reflection. He thought, *Blackmailer. The role; play it to the hilt, throw yourself into it. And some day you'll play Macbeth.*

Should he try it on the bartender? He decided not to.

The blue reflection in the backbar mirror smiled at him. He looked from it to the front windows and the front windows, too, were faintly blue with dusk. And that meant it was time. Corianos might be in the office above his club by now.

He went out into the blue dusk. He took a cab. Not for practical reasons; it was only ten blocks and he could easily have walked. But, psychologically, a cab was important. As important as was an over-size tip to the driver.

The Blue Flamingo, Nick Corianos's current club, was still closed, of course, but the service entrance was open. Sir Charles went in. One waiter was working, putting cloths on tables. Sir Charles asked, "Will you direct me to Mr. Corianos's office, please?"

"Third floor. There's a self-service elevator over there." He pointed, and, looking again at Sir Charles, he added, "Sir."

"Thank you," said Sir Charles.

He took the elevator to the third floor. It let him off in a dimly lighted corridor, from which opened several doors. Only one door had a light behind it showing through the ground glass. It was marked *Private*. He tapped on it gently; a voice called out, "Come in." He went in. Two big men were playing gin rummy across a desk.

One of them asked him, "Yeah?"

"Is either of you Mr. Corianos?"

"What do you want to see him about?"

"My card, sir." Sir Charles handed it to the one who had spoken; he felt sure by looking at them that neither one was Nick Corianos. "Will you tell Mr. Corianos that I wish to speak to him about a matter in connection with the play he is backing?"

The man who had spoken looked at the card. He said, "Okay," put down his hand of cards, walked to the door of an inner office and through it. After a moment he ap-

peared at the door again; he said, "Okay." Sir Charles went in.

Nick Corianos looked up from the card lying on the ornate mahogany desk before him. He asked, "Is it a gag?"

"Is what a gag?"

"Sit down. Is it a gag, or are you really Sir Charles Hanover Gresham? I mean, are you really a—that would be a knight, wouldn't it?"

Sir Charles smiled. "I have never yet admitted, in so many words, that I am not. Would it not be foolish to start now? At any rate, it gets me in to see people much more easily."

Nick Corianos laughed. He said, "I see what you mean. And I'm beginning to guess what you want. You're a ham, aren't you?"

"I am an actor. I have been informed that you are backing a play; in fact, I have seen a script of the play. I am interested in playing the role of Richter."

Nick Corianos frowned. "Richter—that's the name of the blackmailer in the play?"

"It is." Sir Charles held up a hand. "Please do not tell me off-hand that I do not look the part. A true actor can look, and can be, anything. I can be a blackmailer."

Nick Corianos said, "Possibly. But I'm not handling the casting."

Sir Charles smiled, and then let the smile fade. He stood up and leaned forward, his hands resting on Nick's mahogany desk. He smiled again, but the smile was dif-

ferent. His voice was cold, precise. He said, "*Listen pal, you can't shove me off. I know too much. Maybe I can't prove it myself, but the police can, once I tell them where to look. Walter Donovan. Does that name mean anything to you, pal? Or the date September first? Or a spot a hundred yards off the road to Bridgeport, halfway between Stamford and there. Do you think you can—*"

"That's enough," Nick said. There was an ugly black automatic in his right hand. His left was pushing a buzzer on his desk.

Sir Charles Hanover Gresham stared at the automatic, and he saw it; not only the automatic, but everything. He saw death, and for just a second, there was panic.

And then all the panic was gone, and there was left a vast amusement.

It had been perfect, all down the line. *The Perfect Crime*—advertised as such, and he hadn't guessed it. He hadn't even suspected it.

And yet, he thought, why wouldn't—why shouldn't—Wayne Campbell be tired enough of a blackmailer who had bled him, however mildly, for so many years? And why wouldn't one of the best playwrights in the world be clever enough to do it this way?

So clever, and so simple, however Wayne had come across the information against Nick Corianos which he had written on a special page, especially inserted in his copy

of the script. *Speak the speech, I pray you—*

And he had even known that he, Charles, wouldn't give him away. Even now, before the trigger was pulled, he could blurt: "Wayne Campbell knows this, too. He did it, not I!"

But even to say that now couldn't save him, for that black automatic had turned fiction into fact, and although he might manage Campbell's death along with his own, it wouldn't save his own life. Wayne had even known him well enough to know, to be sure, that he wouldn't do that—at no advantage to himself.

He stood up straight, taking his hands off the desk but carefully keeping them at his sides, as the two big men came through the wide doorway that led to the outer office.

Nick said, "Pete, get that canvas mail-sack out of the drawer. And is the car in front of the service entrance?"

"Sure, chief." One of the men ducked back through the door.

Nick hadn't taken his eyes—or the cold muzzle of the gun—off Sir Charles.

Sir Charles smiled at him. He said, "May I ask a boon?"

"What?"

"A favor. Besides the one you already intend to do for me. I ask thirty-five seconds."

"Huh?"

"I've timed it; it should take that

long. Most actors do it in thirty—they push the pace. I refer, of course, to the immortal lines from Macbeth. Have I your permission to die a little later? Thirty-five seconds from now, rather than at this exact instant?”

Nick's eyes got even narrower. He said, “I don't get it, but what's thirty-five seconds, if you really keep your hands in sight?”

Sir Charles said, “*Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow—*”

One of the big men was back in the doorway, something made of canvas rolled up under his arm. He asked, “Is the guy off his rocker—screwy?”

“Shut up,” Nick said.

And then no one was interrupting him.

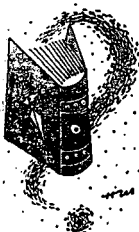
No one was even impatient. And thirty-five seconds were ample.

*“... Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a
poor player
That struts and frets his hour
upon the stage
And then is heard no more; it is
a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound
and fury,
Signifying nothing.”*

He paused, and the quiet pause lengthened.

He bowed slightly and straightened so the audience would know that there was no more. And then Nick's finger tightened on the trigger.

The applause was deafening.



Rex Stout

The World Series Murder

Many critics consider Rex Stout at his very best in the short novel form. Here is one of Mr. Stout's finest—an excellent blend of plot and length, of pace, humor, and characterization, and featuring the inimitable Nero Wolfe.

AT THE END OF THE SIXTH INNING the score was Boston 11, New York 1. I would not have believed that the day would ever come when, seated in a lower box between home and first, at the seventh and deciding game of a World Series between New York and Boston, I would find myself glomming a girl. I am by no means above glomming a girl if she is worthy, but not at a ball game; where my mind is otherwise occupied. That awful day, though, I did.

The situation was complex and will have to be explained. It was a mess even before the game started. Pierre Mondor, owner of a famous restaurant in Paris, was visiting New York and was our house guest at Nero Wolfe's old brownstone on West 35th Street. He got the notion, somehow, that Wolfe had to take him to a baseball game, and Wolfe as his host couldn't refuse. Tickets were no problem, since Emil Chisholm, oil millionaire and part owner of the New York team, considered himself deeply in Wolfe's debt on account

of a case we had handled for him a few years back.

So that October afternoon, a Wednesday, I got the pair of them—the noted private detective and the noted chef—up to the ball park. It was twenty past 1, only ten minutes to game time, and the stands were jammed. I motioned to Mondor, and he slid in and sat. Wolfe stood and glared down at the wooden slats and metal arms. Then he glared at me.

"Are you out of your senses?" he demanded.

"I warned you," I said coldly. "It was designed for men, not mammoths."

He tightened his lips, moved his bulk, lowered it, and tried to squeeze between the arms. No. He grasped the rail in front with both hands, wriggled loose, and perched on the edge of the seat.

Mondor called to me across the great expanse of Wolfe's back: "I depend with confidence on you, Arshee! You must make clear as it develops! What are the little white things?"

I love baseball, I love the New York team, I had 50 bucks up on that game, but I would have got up and gone but for one thing: It was working hours and Wolfe pays my salary, and there were too many people, some of them alive and loose, who felt strongly that he had already lived too long. He is seldom out in the open, easy to get at, and when he is I like to be nearby. So I gritted my teeth and stuck.

The ground crew finished smoothing off and hauled their drags away; the umpires did a huddle, the home team trotted out on the field to their stations; the throng gave with a lusty, excited roar; we all stood up for *The Star-Spangled Banner*, and then sat down again. After southpaw Ed Romeike, 22-4 for the season, had burned a few over for the range, Lew Baker, the catcher, fired it to Tiny Garth at second. The Boston lead-off man came to the white line, the plate umpire said go, and Romeike looked around at the field, toed the rubber, went into his tricky wind-up, and shot a fast one over the outside corner for strike one. The crowd let out a short, sharp yell.

My personal nightmare was bad enough. Mondor was our guest, and trying to tell a foreigner what a base on balls is during a World Series game, with two men on, two down, and Oaky Asmussen at bat, is hard on the nerves. As for Wolfe, it wasn't so much the sight of him there in his concentrated misery; it

was the certainty that by tomorrow he would have figured out a way to blame it on me, and that would start a feud.

Bad enough, but more was to come, and not for me alone. One fly had plopped into the soup even before the game started, when the line-up was announced and Tiny Garth was named for second base, with no explanation. A buzz of amazement had filled the stands. Why not Nick Ferrone? Ferrone, a lanky, big-eared kid just up from the bush five months back, had fielded and batted himself so far to the front that it was taken for granted he would be voted rookie of the year. He had been spectacular in the first six games of the Series, batting .427. Where was he today? Why Garth?

Then the game: That was no personal nightmare of mine; it was all too public. In the first inning Con Prentiss, New York's shortstop, bobbled an easy grounder, and two minutes later Lew Baker, the catcher, trying to nab a runner at second, threw the ball six feet over Garth's head into the outfield. With luck the visitors scored only one run. In the second inning Nat Neill, center fielder, misjudged a fly he could have walked under, tried to run in three directions at once, and had to chase it to the fence; and soon after that, Prentiss grabbed a hard-hit ball on the hop and hurled it into the dirt three paces to the left of third base. By

the time they got three out, Boston had two more runs.

As the New York team came in for their turn at bat in the second, bitter sarcasms from the stands greeted them. Then our section was distracted by an incident. A man in a hurry came plunging down the aisle, bumping my elbow as he passed, and pulled up alongside a front box occupied by six men, among them the Mayor of New York and oilman Emil Chisholm, who had provided our tickets. The man spoke into the ear of Chisholm, who looked anything but happy. Chisholm said something to his boxmates, arose, and beat it up the aisle double-quick, followed by cutting remarks from nearby fans who had recognized him. As my eyes went back to the arena, Con Prentiss, New York shortstop, swung at a floater and missed by a mile.

There is no point in my retailing the agony. As I said, at the end of the sixth the score was 11 to 1. Romeike was hurling all right, but his support would have been pitiful on a sand lot. Joe Eston, the third baseman, and Nat Neill had each made two errors, and Con Prentiss and Lew Baker three apiece. As they came to the dugout in the sixth one wit yelled, "Say it ain't true, Joel!" at Eston, and the crowd, recognizing that classic moan to Shoeless Joe Jackson, let out a howl. They were getting really rough. As for me, I had had plenty of the

tragedy out on the diamond and was looking around for something less painful, when I caught sight of the girl, in a box off to my right.

I glommed her, not offensively. There were two of them. One was a redhead who would start to get plump in a couple of years; almost worthy, but not quite. The other one, the glommee, had light-brown hair and dark-brown eyes, and was fully qualified. I had the feeling that she was not a complete stranger, that I had seen her somewhere before, but couldn't place her.

The pleasure it gave me to look at her was not pure, because it was adulterated with resentment. She looked happy. Her eyes sparkled. Apparently she liked the way things were going. There is no law barring enemy fans from a ball park, but I resented it. Nevertheless, I continued the glommation. She was the only object I had seen there that day, on or off the field, that didn't make me want to shut my eyes.

Something came between her and me. A man stopped at my elbow, and asked my ear: "Are you Archie Goodwin?"

I told him yes.

"Is that Nero Wolfe?"

I nodded.

"Mr. Chisholm wants him in the clubhouse, quick."

I reflected for two seconds, decided that this was straight from heaven, and slid forward to tell Wolfe: "Mr. Chisholm invites us to

the clubhouse. We'll avoid the crush. There's a chair there. He wants to see you."

He didn't growl, "What about?" He didn't even growl. He muttered something to Mondor, pulled himself erect, and side-stepped past me to the aisle. Mondor came after him. The courier led the way and I brought up the rear. As we went up the concrete steps single file a shout came from somewhere on the left:

"Go get 'em, Nero! Sic 'em!"

Such is fame. . . .

"This is urgent!" Emil Chisholm squeaked. "It's urgent."

There was no chair in the club-room of the size Wolfe likes and needs, but there was a big leather couch, and he was on it, breathing hard and scowling. Mondor was seated over against the wall, out of it. Chisholm, a hefty, broad-shouldered guy, with a wide, thick mouth and a long, straight nose, was too upset to stand or sit, so he was boiling around. I was standing near an open window. Through it came a sudden swelling roar from the crowd out in the stands.

"Shut that window!" Chisholm barked.

I did so.

"I'm going home," Wolfe stated in his most conclusive tone. "But not until they have left. Perhaps, if you will tell me briefly—"

"We've lost the Series!" Chisholm shouted.

Wolfe closed his eyes, and opened them again. "If you'll keep

your voice down," he suggested. "I've had enough noise today. If losing the Series is your problem, I'm afraid I can't help."

"No. Nobody can." Chisholm stood facing him. "I blew up. I'm sorry. I've got to get hold of myself. This is what happened: Out there before the game Art got a suspicion—"

"Art?"

"Art Kinney, our manager. Naturally, he was watching the boys like a hawk, and he got a suspicion something was wrong. That first—"

"Why was he watching them like a hawk?"

"That's his job! He's manager!" Chisholm realized he was shouting again, stopped, clamped his jaw, and clenched his fists. After a second he went on: "Also, Nick Ferrone has disappeared. He was here with them in the clubhouse, he had got into uniform; then, after they went out to the dugout, he just wasn't there. Art sent Doc Soffer back here to get him, but he couldn't find him. He was simply gone. Art had to put Garth at second base. Naturally, he was on edge, and he noticed things—the way some of the boys looked and acted—that made him suspicious. Then—"

A door opened and a guy came running in, yelling, "Fitch hit one and Neill let it get by, and Asmusen scored! Fitch went on to third!"

I recognized him, chiefly by his

crooked nose, which had got in the way of a line drive back in the twenties, when he was a star infielder. It was Beaky Durkin, now a New York scout, with a new lease on life because he had dug up Nick Ferrone out in Arkansas.

Chisholm yelled at him, "Get out!" He took a threatening step. "Get out! . . . Hey, Doc! Come in here!"

Durkin, backing out, collided with a man in the doorway. This was Doc Soffer, New York's veteran medico, bald, wearing black-rimmed glasses; he had a long torso and short legs. Entering, he looked as if his ten best-paying patients had just died on him.

"I can't sweat it, Doc," Chisholm told him. "I'm going nuts! This is Nero Wolfe. You tell him."

"Who are you?" Wolfe demanded.

Soffer stopped before him. "I'm Dr. Horton Soffer," he said, clipping it. "Four of my men have been drugged. They're out there now, trying to play ball, and they can't." He stopped, looking as if he were about to break down and cry, gulped, and went on:

"They didn't seem right, there in the dugout. I noticed it and so did Kinney. That first inning there was no doubt about it, something was wrong. The second inning it was even worse—and the same four men, Baker, Prentiss, Neill, and Eston. I got an idea, and came here to investigate. You see that cooler?"

He pointed to a big, white-enamelled refrigerator standing against a wall.

Wolfe nodded. "Well?"

"It contains mostly an assortment of drinks in bottles. I know my men's habits, every little habit they've got and every big one, too. I know that after they get into uniform before a game those four men—the four I named—have the habit of getting a bottle of Beebright out of the cooler."

"What is Beebright?"

"It's a carbonated drink that's supposed to have honey in it instead of sugar. Each of those four men drinks a bottle of it, or part of one, before he goes out to the field, practically without exception. And it was those four that were off—terrible! I never saw anything like it. That's how I got my idea. I told Kinney, and he said to come and see.

"Usually the clubhouse boy cleans up here after the men leave for the field, but this being the deciding game of the World Series, today he didn't. Stuff was scattered around—as you see, it still is—and there was a Beebright bottle there on that table with a little left in it. It didn't smell wrong, and I didn't want to waste any tasting. I had sent for Mr. Chisholm, and when he came we decided what to do. He sent for Beaky Durkin, who had a seat in the grandstand, because he knew Ferrone better than anyone else. We thought he might have

some idea that would help explain what had happened to Ferrone and those four other boys. I took the Beebright down the street to a drugstore, and made two tests. The first one, Ranwez's, didn't prove anything, but that was probably because it is limited—"

"Negatives may be skipped," Wolfe muttered.

"I'm telling you what I did," Soffer snapped. "Ranwez's test took over half an hour. The second, Ekert's, took less. I did it twice, to check. It was conclusive. The Beebright contained sodium phenobarbital. I couldn't get the quantity, in a hurry like that, but on a guess it was two grains, possibly a little more, in the full bottle. Anyone can get hold of it. Certainly that would be no problem for a bigtime gambler who wanted to clean up on a World Series game."

Chisholm swore, audibly.

Doc Soffer nodded. "And somebody put it in the bottles, knowing those four men would drink it just before the game. All he had to do was remove the caps, drop the tablets, in, replace the caps, and shake the bottles a little—not much, because it's very soluble. They must have been placed in the refrigerator not much before noon; otherwise someone else might have drunk them. Besides, if they were fixed very far in advance, the drinks would have gone stale and the men would have noticed it. So it must have been someone—"

Chisholm had marched to the window. He whirled and yelled, "Feronne did it! He did it and lammed!"

Doc Soffer said, "I don't know about that, but I've got to tell Art —" He almost ran from the room.

Beaky Durkin appeared again. He came through the door and halted, facing Chisholm. He was trembling and his face was white, all but the crooked nose.

"Not Nick," he said hoarsely. "Not that boy. Nick didn't do it!"

"Oh, no?" Chisholm was bitter. "Did I ask you? A fine rookie of the year you brought in from Arkansas! Where is he? Bring him here and let me get my hands on him! Go find him!"

Beaky looked bewildered. "Go where?"

"How do I know? He's your pet, not mine," Chisholm said savagely. "Get him and bring him in and I'll offer him a new contract—that will be a contract. Now beat it!"

Durkin lifted helpless hands, but turned and left the room.

Wolfe grunted. "Sit down, please," he told Chisholm. "When I address you I want to look at you, and my neck is not elastic. . . . Thank you, sir. You want to hire me for a job?"

"Yes. I want—"

"Please. Is this correct? Four of your best players, drugged as described by Dr. Soffer, could not perform properly, and as a result a game is lost and a World Series?"

"We're losing it." Chisholm's head swung toward the window and back again. "Art's pulling out the drugged men, but of course it's lost."

"And you assume a gambler or a group of gamblers is responsible. How much could he or they win on a game?"

"On today's game, any amount. Fifty thousand, or double that, easy."

"I see. Then you need the police. At once."

Chisholm shook his head. "I don't want to. Baseball is a wonderful game, the best and cleanest game on earth. This is the dirtiest thing that's happened in baseball in 30 years, and it's got to be handled right and handled fast. You're the best detective in the business, and you're right here. With a swarm of cops trooping in, who knows what'll happen! If we have to have them later, all right, but now you're here. Go to it!"

Wolfe was frowning. "You think this Nick Ferrone did it."

"I don't know!" Chisholm was yelling again. "How do I know what I think? He's a harebrained kid just out of the sticks, and he's disappeared. What does that look like?"

Wolfe nodded. "Very well." He drew a deep sigh. "I can at least make some gestures, and see." He aimed a finger at the door Beaky Durkin and Doc Soffer had used. "Is that an office?"

"It leads to Kinney's office—the manager's."

"Then it has a phone. You will call police headquarters and report the disappearance of Nick Ferrone, and ask them to find him. Such a job, when urgent, is beyond my resources. Tell them nothing more for the present if you want it that way. Where do the players change clothing?"

"Through there." Chisholm indicated another door. "That's the locker room. The shower room is beyond."

Wolfe's eyes came to me: "Archie. You will look around all premises adjoining this room. This room you can leave to me."

"Anything in particular?" I asked.

"No. You have good eyes and a head of sorts. Use them."

"I could wait to phone the police," Chisholm suggested, "until you—"

"No," Wolfe snapped. "In ten minutes you can have every cop in New York looking for Mr. Ferrone, and it will cost you ten cents. Spend it. I charge more for less."

Chisholm went out, through the door at the left. I thought I might as well start in that direction, and followed him across a hall and into another room. It was good-sized, furnished with desk, chairs, and accessories. Beaky Durkin sat in a corner with his ear to a radio tuned low, and Doc Soffer was there with him. Chisholm barked, "Shut that

thing off!" and crossed to a desk with a phone.

Under other circumstances I would have enjoyed having a look at the office of Art Kinney, the New York manager, but I was on a mission and there was too big an audience. I about-faced and backtracked to the clubroom. As I crossed to the door in the far wall, Wolfe was standing by the open door of the refrigerator with a bottle of Beebright in his hand, holding it at arm's length, sneering at it, and Mondor was beside him.

I passed through the door and was in a room both long and wide, with two rows of lockers, benches and stools, and a couple of chairs. The locker doors were marked with numbers and names. I tried three; they were locked. Through a doorway at the left was the shower room. I went to the far end, glancing in at each of the shower stalls, was disappointed to see no pillbox that might have contained sodium phenobarbital, and returned to the locker room.

In the middle of the row on the right was the locker marked "Ferrone." Its door was locked. With my portable key collection I could have operated, but I don't take it along to ball games, and nothing on my personal ring was usable. It seemed to me that the inside of that locker was the first place that needed attention, so I returned to the clubroom, made a face at Wolfe as I went by, and entered Kinney's of-

fice. Chisholm had finished phoning and was seated at a desk, staring at the floor. Beaky Durkin and Doc Soffer had their ears glued to the radio.

I asked Chisholm, "Have you got a key to Ferrone's locker?"

His head jerked up. "No. I think Kinney has a master key. I don't know where he keeps it."

"Fifteen to two," Durkin informed us, or maybe he was just talking to himself. "New York batting in the ninth, two down. Garth got a home run, bases empty. It's all—"

"Shut up!" Chisholm yelled at him.

Since Kinney would soon be with us, and since Ferrone's locker had first call, I thought I might as well wait there for him. However, with our client sitting there glaring at me it would be well to display some interest and energy, so I moved. I went to the filing cabinets and looked them over. I opened a door, saw a hall leading to stairs going down, and shut the door. I crossed to another door in the opposite wall, and opened that.

Since I hadn't the faintest expectation of finding anything pertinent beyond that door, let alone a corpse, I must have made some sign of surprise, but if so it wasn't noticed. I stood for three seconds, then slipped inside and squatted long enough to get an answer to the main question. I arose, backed out, and addressed Soffer:

"Take a look here, Doc. I think he's dead."

He made a noise, stared, and moved. I marched into the clubroom and crossed to the couch where Wolfe was sitting.

"Found something," I told him. "Nick Ferrone, in uniform, on the floor of a closet, with a baseball bat alongside him and his head smashed in. He's dead, according to me, but Doc Soffer is checking, if you want an expert opinion."

Wolfe grunted. "Call the police."

"Yes, sir. A question: A minute the ballplayers will be coming in here. The cops won't like it if they mess around. Do we care? It won't be Cramer. This is the Bronx, not Manhattan. Do we—?"

A bellow, Chisholm's, came through: "Wolfe! Come in herel!"

Wolfe got up, growling. "We owe the police nothing, but we have a client—I think we have. I'll see. Meanwhile, you stay here. Everyone entering this room remains, under surveillance." He headed for Kinney's office.

Another door opened, the one in the west wall, and Nat Neill, New York's center fielder, entered the clubroom, his jaw set and his eyes blazing. Following him came Lew Baker, the catcher. Behind them on the stairs, was a clatter of footsteps.

The game was over. New York had lost. . . .

Another thing I don't take along to ball games is a gun, but that day

there was a moment when I wished I had. After an ordinary game, even a lost one, I suppose the team might have been merely irritated if, on getting to the clubhouse, they found a stranger backed up against the door to the locker room telling them they could not pass. But that day they were ready to plug one another, so why not a stranger?

The first dozen were ganging me, about to start using hands, when Art Kinney, the manager, appeared. He strode, tight-lipped, through to his office and the gang let up to consider; all but Bill Moyse, the second-string catcher, six-feet-two and over 200 pounds. He had come late, after Kinney. He strode up to me, making fists, and announced that his wife was waiting for him, he was going in to change, and either I would move or he would move me.

One of his teammates called: "Show him her picture, Bill! That'll move him!"

Moyse whirled and leaped. Hands grabbed for him but he kept going. Whether he reached his target or not I can't say, because, first, I was staying put and it was quite a mix-up, and, second, I was seeing something that wasn't present. The mention of Moyse's wife and her picture had done it. What I was seeing was a picture of a girl that had appeared in the *Gazette* a couple of months back, with a caption tagging her as the show-girl bride of William Moyse, the

ballplayer; and it was the girl I had been glomming in a nearby box when the summons had come from Chisholm. No question about it. That was interesting.

Meanwhile, Moyse was doing me a service by making a diversion. Three or four men had hold of him, and others were gathered around his target, Con Prentiss, the shortstop. They were all jabbering. Prentiss, who was wiry and tough, was showing his teeth in a grin, not an attractive one. Moyse suddenly whirled again and was heading back for me. It was useless to start slugging that mountain of muscle, and I was set to try blocking him, when a loud voice came from the doorway to the manager's office:

"Here! Attention, all of you!"

It was Art Kinney. His face was absolutely white and his neck cords were twitching, as they all turned toward him.

"I'm full up," he said, half hysterical. "This is Nero Wolfe, the detective. He'll tell you something."

Muttering began as Kinney stepped aside and Wolfe took his place in the doorway. The great man's eyes swept over them, and then he spoke:

"You deserve an explanation, gentlemen, but the police are coming and there's not much time. You have just lost a ball game by knavery. Four of you were drugged, in a drink called Beebright, and could not perform properly. You will learn—"

They drowned him out. It was an explosion of astonished rage.

"Gentlemen!" Wolfe thundered. "Will you listen?" He glowered. "You will learn more of that later, but there is something more urgent. The dead body of one of your colleagues, Mr. Nick Ferrone, has been discovered on these premises. He was murdered. It is supposed, naturally, that the two events, the drugging and the murder, are connected. In any case, if you do not know what a murder investigation means to everyone within reach, innocent or not, you are about to learn. For the moment you will not leave this room. When the police arrive they will tell you—"

Heavy feet were clomping in the hall. The door swung open and a uniformed cop stepped in, followed by three others. The one in front, a sergeant, halted and demanded indignantly:

"What's all this? Where is it?"

The team looked at the cops, and hadn't a word to say. . . .

Inspector Hennessy of Bronx Homicide was tall and straight, silver-haired, with a bony face and quick-moving gray eyes. Two years before he had told Nero Wolfe that if he ever again tried poking into a murder in the Bronx he would be escorted to the Harlem River and dunked. But when, at 9 o'clock that evening, Hennessy breezed through the clubroom, passing in front of the leather couch where Wolfe was seated, with a ham sand-

wich in one hand and a bottle of beer in the other, he didn't even toss him a glance. He was much too busy.

The Police Commissioner was in Manager Kinney's office with Chisholm and others. The Bronx District Attorney and an assistant were in the locker room, along with an assortment of Homicide men, giving various athletes their third or fourth quiz. There were still a couple of dozen city employees in the clubhouse, though the scientists—the photographers and fingerprint hounds—had all finished and gone.

I had standing as the finder of the corpse, but also I was a part of Wolfe. Technically, Wolfe was not poking into a murder; he had been hired by Chisholm, before the corpse had been found, to find out who had doped the ballplayers. However, in gathering facts for relay to Wolfe I had not discriminated. I saw Nick Ferrone's locker opened and the contents examined, with no startling disclosures.

While I was in Kinney's office watching a basket squad load the corpse and carry it out, I heard a lieutenant on the phone giving instructions for a roundup of gamblers throughout the metropolitan area. A little later I picked up a bunch of signed statements from a table, and sat down and read them through, without anyone noticing. By that time the commissioner and the district attorney had arrived, and they had eight or nine quiz

posts going in the various rooms, and Hennessy was doing his best to keep it organized.

I collected all I could for Wolfe. The bat that had been used to crack Ferrone's skull was no stock item, but a valued trophy. With it, years back, there had been belted a grand slam home run that had won a pennant, and it had been displayed on a wall rack in the manager's office. The murderer could have simply grabbed it from the rack. It had no usable fingerprints. Of eight bottles of Beebright left in the cooler, the two in front had been doped and the other six had not. No other drinks had been tampered with. Everyone had known of the liking of those four—Baker, Prentiss, Neill, and Eston—for Beebright, and their habit of drinking a bottle of it before a game. No good prints. No sign anywhere of a container of sodium phenobarbital tablets.

There were a thousand other negatives; for instance, the clubhouse boy, Jimmie Burr. The custom was that when he wasn't around, the players would put chits in a little box for what they took; and he hadn't been around. For that game someone had got him a box seat, and he had beat it to the grandstand while most of the players were in the locker room, changing. A sergeant jumped on it: Who had got him out of the way by providing a ticket for a box seat? But it had been Art Kinney himself.

Around 8 o'clock they turned a big batch loose. Twenty men, including coaches and the bat boy, were allowed to go to the locker room to change, under surveillance, and then let out, with instructions to keep available. They were not in the picture as it then looked.

It was established that Ferrone had arrived at the clubhouse shortly after 1 o'clock and had got into uniform; a dozen of the men had been in the locker room with him. He had been present during a pregame session with Kinney in the clubroom, and no one remembered seeing him leave afterward. When they trooped out and down the stairs and emerged onto the field, Ferrone's absence was not noticed until they had been in the dugout for some minutes.

As the cops figured it, he couldn't have been slammed with a baseball bat in Kinney's office only a few yards away, while the team was in the clubroom, and therefore all who had unquestionably left for the field with the gang, and had stayed there, were in the clear until further notice. With them went Pierre Mondor, who had wanted to see a ball game and had picked a beaut.

As I said, when Inspector Hennessy breezed through the clubroom at 9 o'clock, coming from the locker room and headed for Kinney's office, he didn't even toss a glance at the leather couch where

Wolfe and I were seated. He disappeared. But soon he was back again, speaking from the doorway:

"Come in here, will you, Wolfe?"

"No," Wolfe said. "I'm eating."

"The commissioner wants you."

"Is he eating?" Waiting for no reply, Wolfe turned his head and belted, "Mr. Skinner! I'm dining!"

It wasn't very polite, I thought, to be sarcastic about the sandwiches and beer Chisholm had provided. Hennessy started a remark which indicated that he agreed with me, but it was interrupted by the appearance of Commissioner Skinner at his elbow. Hennessy stepped in and aside, and Skinner approached the couch, followed by Chisholm.

Skinner kept it friendly: "I've just learned that four men who were told they could go are still here: Baker, Prentiss, Neill, and Eston. When Inspector Hennessy asked them why, they told him that Mr. Chisholm had asked them to stay. Mr. Chisholm says that he did so at your suggestion. He understood that you wanted to speak with them after our men have all left. Is that correct?"

Wolfe nodded. "I made it quite plain, I thought."

"M-m." The commissioner regarded him. "You see, I know you fairly well. You wouldn't dream of hanging on here half the night to speak with those men merely as a routine step in an investigation. And, besides, at Mr. Chisholm's request you have already been per-

mitted to speak with them, and with several others. You're cooking something. Those are the four men who were drugged, but they left the clubhouse for the field with the rest of the team, so the way we figure it, none of them killed Ferrone. How do you figure it?"

Wolfe swallowed the last of a well-chewed bite. "I don't."

Hennessy growled and set his jaw.

Skinner said, "I don't believe it," with his tone friendlier than his words. "You're cooking something," he insisted. "What's the play with those four men?"

Wolfe shook his head. "No, sir."

Hennessy took a step forward. "Look," he said; "this is the Bronx. You don't turn *this* murder into a parlor game."

Wolfe raised brows at him. "Murder? I am not concerned with murder. Mr. Chisholm hired me to investigate the drugging of his employees. The two events may, of course, be connected, but the murder is your job. And they were not necessarily connected. I understand that a man named Moyse is in there now with the district attorney"—Wolfe aimed a thumb at the door to the locker room—"because it has been learned that he has twice within a month assaulted Mr. Ferrone physically through resentment at Ferrone's interest in his wife, injudiciously displayed. And that Moyse did not leave the clubhouse with the others, but arrived at the

dugout three or four minutes later, just before Ferrone's absence was noticed. For your murder, Mr. Hennessy, that should be a help; but it doesn't get me on with my job—disclosure of the culprit who drugged the drinks. Have you charged Mr. Moyse?"

"No." Hennessy was curt. "So you're not interested in the murder?"

"Not as a job, since it's not mine. But if you want a comment from a specialist, you're closing your lines too soon."

"We haven't closed any lines."

"You let twenty men walk out of here. You are keeping Moyse for the reasons given. You are keeping Dr. Soffer, I suppose, because when Ferrone was missed in the dugout Soffer came here to look for him, and he could have found him here alive and killed him. You are keeping Mr. Durkin, I suppose again, because he, too, could have been here alone with Ferrone. He says he left the clubhouse shortly before the team did and went to his seat in the grandstand, and stayed there. Has he been either contradicted or corroborated?"

"No."

"Then you regard him as vulnerable on opportunity?"

"Yes."

"Are you holding Mr. Chisholm for the same reason?"

Chisholm made a noise. Skinner and Hennessy stared. Skinner said, "We're not holding Mr. Chisholm."

"You should be, for consistency," Wolfe declared. "This afternoon, when I reached my seat in the stands, at twenty minutes past one, the mayor and others were there in a nearby box, but Mr. Chisholm was not. He arrived a few minutes later. He has told me that when he arrived with his party, about 1 o'clock, he had the others escorted to the stands, that he started for the clubhouse for a word with his employees, that he was delayed by the crowd and decided it was too late, and then proceeded to the box. If the others are vulnerable on opportunity, so is he."

They made remarks, all three of them, not appreciative.

Wolfe put the beer bottle to his lips, tilted it, and swallowed. He put the bottle down empty.

"I was merely," he said mildly, "commenting on the murder as a specialist. As for my job, learning who drugged the drinks, I haven't even made a start. How could I in this confounded hubbub? Trampled by an army. I have been permitted to sit here and talk to people, yes, with a succession of your subordinates standing behind me breathing down my neck. Pfu!"

"Very rude, I'm sure," Hennessy said dryly. "The commissioner has asked you, what's the play with those four men?"

Wolfe shook his head. "Not only those four. I included others in my request to Mr. Chisholm: Dr. Soffer. Mr. Kinney, Mr. Durkin, and

of course Mr. Chisholm himself. I am not arranging a parlor game. I make a living as a professional detective, and I need their help on this job I've undertaken. I think I know why—engrossed as you are with the most sensational case you've had in years—you're spending all this time chatting with me: You suspect I'm contriving a finesse. Well, I am."

"You are?"

"Yes." Wolfe suddenly was peevish. "Haven't I sat here for five hours submerged in your pandemonium? Haven't you all the facts that I have, and many more besides? Haven't you thousands of men to command—and I but one? One little fact strikes me, as apparently it has not struck you, and in my forlorn desperation I decide to test my interpretation of it. For that test I need help, and I ask Mr. Chisholm to provide it."

"We'll be glad to help," Skinner offered. "Which fact, and how do you interpret it?"

"No, sir." Wolfe was positive. "It is my one slender chance to earn a fee. I intend—"

"But we may not know this fact."

"Certainly you do. I have stated it explicitly during this conversation, but I won't point at it for you. If I did you'd spoil it for me, and, slender as it is, I intend to test it. I am not beset with the urgency of murder, as you are, but I'm in a fix. I don't need a motive strong enough

to incite a man to murder, merely one to persuade him to drug some bottled drinks—mildly, far from lethally. A thousand dollars? Twenty thousand? That would be only a fraction of the possible winnings on a World Series game. As for opportunity, anyone at all could have slipped in here late this morning, before others had arrived, with drugged bottles of that drink and put them in the cooler—and earned a fortune. Those twenty men you let go, Mr. Hennessy—how many of them can you say positively did not drug the drinks?”

The inspector was scowling at him. “I can say that I don’t think any of them killed Ferrone.”

“Ah, but I’m not after the murderer; that’s your job.” Wolfe upturned a palm. “You see why I am driven to a forlorn finesse?”

We all turned, as a man came in from the locker room. District Attorney Megalech of the Bronx was as masterful as they come and bald as a doorknob. He strode across and told Skinner and Hennessy he wanted to speak with them, took an elbow of each, and steered them through the door to Kinney’s office. Chisholm, uninvited, wheeled and followed them.

Wolfe reached for a sandwich and I arose and stood looking down at him. I asked, “How good is this fact you’re saving up?”

“Not very.” He chewed and swallowed. “Good enough to try if we get nothing better. Evidently

they have nothing at all. You heard them.”

“Yeah. You told them they have all the facts you have, but they haven’t. The one I gave you about Mrs. Moyse? That’s not the one you’re interpreting privately?”

“No.”

“She might still be around, waiting. I might possibly get something better than the one you’re saving. Shall I go try?”

He grunted. I took it for a yes, and moved. Outside the hall door stood a cop: I addressed him: “I’m going down to buy Mr. Wolfe a pickle. Do I need to be passed out or in?”

“You?” He used only the right half of his mouth for talking. “Shoot your way through. Huh?”

“Right. Many thanks.” I went.

... It was dumb to be so surprised, but I was. I might have known that the news that New York had been doped out of the game and the Series, and that Nick Ferrone, the rookie of the year, had been murdered, would draw a record mob. Downstairs inside the entrance there were sentries, and outside a regiment was stretched into a cordon. I was explaining to a sergeant who I was and telling him I would be returning, when three desperate men, one of whom I recognized, came springing at me. All they wanted was the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. I had to get really rude. I

have been clawed at by newspapermen more than once, but I had never seen them quite as hungry as they were that October night. As they wouldn't shake loose, I dived through the cordon and into the mob.

It looked hopeless. The only parked cars in sight on that side of the street were police cars. I pushed through to the fringe of the throng and made my way two blocks south. Having made inquiries of two members of the team hours before, I knew what I was looking for: a light-blue sedan.

I crossed the street and headed for the parking plaza. Two cops in the cordon gave me a look, but it wasn't the plaza they were guarding and I marched on through. In the dim light I could see three cars over at the north end. Closer up, one was a light-blue sedan. I went up to it. Two females on the front seat were gazing at me through the window, and one of them was my glommee. The radio was on. I opened the door and said hello.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

"My name's Archie Goodwin. I'll show credentials if you are Mrs. William Moyse."

"What if I am?"

She was rapidly erasing the pleasant memory I had of her. Not that she had turned homely in a few hours, but her expression was not only unfriendly but sour, and her voice was not agreeable. I got out my wallet and extracted my license

card. "If you are who I think you are," I said, "this will identify me."

"Okay, your name's Goodman." She ignored the card. "So what?"

"Not Goodman." I pronounced it for her: "Archie Goodwin. I work for Nero Wolfe, who is up in the clubhouse. I just came from there. Why not turn off the radio?"

"I'd rather turn you off," she said bitterly.

Her companion, the redhead who had been with her in the box, reached for the knob, and the radio died. "Look, Lila," she said earnestly; "you're acting like a sap. Invite him in. He may be human. Maybe Bill sent him."

"What did Walt tell us?" Lila snapped at her. "Nero Wolfe is there working with the cops." She came back at me: "Did my husband send you? Prove it."

I put a foot on the edge of the frame, not aggressively. "That's one reason," I said, "why Mr. Wolfe can't stand women. The way they flop around, intellectually. I didn't say your husband sent me. He didn't. He couldn't even if he wanted to, because for the past hour he has been kept in the locker room conversing with a gathering of homicide hounds, and still is. Mr. Wolfe sent me. But in a way it's a personal problem I've got, and no one but you can help me."

"You've got a personal problem! You have! Take it away."

"I will if you say so, but wait till I tell you. Up to now they have

only one reason for picking on your husband. The players left the clubhouse for the field in a bunch—all but one of them, who left later and got to the dugout a few minutes after the others. It was Bill Moyse. They all agreed on that, and Bill admits it. The cops figure that he had seen or heard something that made him suspect Nick Ferrone of doping the drinks—you know about that? That the Bee-bright was doped?"

"Yes. Walt Goidell told me." She gestured toward the redhead. "Helen's husband. He's on the team."

"And that he stayed behind with Ferrone to put it to him, and Nick got tough, and he got tougher, with a baseball bat. That's how the cops figure it, and that's why they're after Bill. But I have a private reason, confided only to Nero Wolfe, to think that the cops have got it twisted. Mr. Wolfe is inclined to agree with me, but he hasn't told the cops, because he has been hired by Chisholm and wants to earn a fat fee. My private slant is that if Bill did kill Ferrone—please note the 'if'—it wasn't because he caught Ferrone doping the drinks, but the other way around. Ferrone caught Bill doping the drinks, and was going to spill it, and Bill killed him."

She was goggling at me. "You have the nerve—!"

"Hold it. I'm telling you. This afternoon at the game I was in a box. By the sixth inning I had had

plenty of the game and looked around for something to take my mind off it, and I saw an extremely attractive girl. I looked at her some more. I had a feeling that I had seen her before, but couldn't place her. The score was 11 to 1, the home team were flat on their faces, and that lovely specimen was exactly what my eyes needed—except for one flaw. She was having a swell time. Her whole face and manner showed it. She liked what was happening out on the field."

She was trying to say something, but I raised my voice a little: "Wait till I tell you. Later, after the game, in the clubhouse, Bill Moyse said his wife was waiting for him, and someone made a crack about showing me her picture. Then it clicked. I remembered seeing a picture of his bride in the *Gazette*, and it was the girl I had seen in the stands. Then, later, I had a chance to ask some of the players some questions, and I learned that she usually drove to games in Bill's light-blue sedan and waited for him after the game. It puzzled me that it made the wife of a New York player happy to see his team getting walloped in the deciding game of a World Series, and Mr. Wolfe agreed. Why were you tickled stiff to see them losing?"

"I wasn't."

"It's perfectly ridiculous," the redhead snorted.

I shook my head. "That won't do. Mr. Wolfe accepts my judgment on girls, and I have told him you were

happy. If I go back and report that you flatly deny it, I don't see how he can do anything but tell the cops, and that will be bad. They'll figure that you wanted New York to lose because you knew Bill did, and why. Then, of course, they'll refigure the murder and get a new answer—that Ferrone found out that Bill had doped the drinks, and Bill killed him. They'll start on Bill all over again and—"

"Stop it!"

"I was only saying, if they—"

The redhead horned in, then. "How dumb can you get?" she demanded. "You say you know girls! Do you know baseball girls? I'm one! I'm Helen Goidell, Walt's wife. I would have liked to slap Lila this afternooon, sitting there gloating, much as I love her. But I'm not a sap like you! She's not married to the team, she's married to Bill! Lew Baker had batted .132 in the first six games of the Series, and he had made four errors and had nine bases stolen on him, and still they wouldn't give Bill a chance. Lila had sat through those six games praying to see Bill walk out—and not once! What did she care about the Series? She wanted to see Bill in it. And look at Baker this afternoon! If he had been doped, all right, but Lila didn't know it then. All she knew was that Bill was probably going to get his chance. What you know about girls, you nitwit!"

She was blazing.

"I'm still willing to learn," I said agreeably. "Is she right, Mrs. Moyse?"

"Yes."

"Then I am, too, on the main point? You were pleased to see New York losing?"

"I said she was right."

"Yeah. Then I've still got a problem. If I accept your version, and report to Wolfe accordingly, he'll accept it, too. Whether you think I know girls or not, he does. So that's some responsibility for me. What if you're a lot smoother and trickier than I think you are? Your husband is suspected of murder, and they're still working on him. What if he's guilty and they manage to squeeze out of you what they need to hook him? How will I look if they do? Any suggestions?"

Lila had none. She sat with her head lowered, silent.

"You sound almost human," Helen Goidell said.

"That's deceptive," I told her. "I turn it on and off. If I thought she had something Mr. Wolfe could use I'd stop at nothing, even hair-pulling. But at the moment I really don't think she has. I think she's pure and innocent and wholesome. Her husband is another matter. For her sake, I hope he wriggles out of it somehow, but I'm not taking any bets. The cops seem to like him, and I know cops as well as I do girls." I removed my foot from the car frame. "So long and so forth." I turned to go.

"Wait a minute." It was Lila.

I turned back. Her head was up.

"Is this straight?" she asked.

"Is what straight?"

"You're going to tell Mr. Wolfe you're satisfied about me?"

"Well. Satisfied is quite a word. I'm going to tell him I have bought your explanation of your happiness at the game—or, rather, Mrs. Goidell's."

"You could be a liar."

"Not only could be, I often am, but not at the moment."

She regarded me. "Maybe you can tell me about Bill," she said. "They don't really think he killed Nick Ferrone, do they?"

"They think maybe he did."

"I know he didn't."

"Good for you. But you weren't there, so you don't have a vote."

She nodded. She was being hard and practical. "Are they going to arrest him? Will they really charge him with murder?"

"I can't say. But Bill is the leading candidate."

"Then I've got to do something. I wish I knew what he's telling them. Do you know?"

"Only that he's denying he knows anything about it. He says he left the clubhouse after the others had gone, because he went back to the locker room to change to other shoes."

She shook her head. "I don't mean that. I mean, whether he told them—" She stopped. "No. I know he didn't. He wouldn't. He knows

something and I know it, too, about a man trying to fix that game. Only, he wouldn't tell, on account of me. I have to go and see someone downtown. Will you come along?"

"To see who?"

"I'll tell you on the way."

Helen Goidell blurted, "For heaven's sake, Lila, do you know what you're saying?"

If Lila replied I missed it, for I was on my way around the car. It was a little headstrong to dash off with a damsel, leaving Wolfe up there with mass-production sandwiches, warm beer, and his one measly little fact he was saving up, but this might be really hot.

By the time I got around to the other door Helen had it open and was getting out. Her feet on the ground, she turned to speak: "I don't want any part of this, Lila. I do not! I wish I'd gone with Walt instead of staying with you!"

She turned and trotted off, toward the street. I climbed in and pulled the door shut.

"She'll tell Walt," Lila said.

I nodded. "Yeah. But does she know where we're going?"

"No."

"Then let's go."

She started the engine, levered to reverse, and backed the car.

Under ordinary circumstances she was probably a pretty good driver, but that night wasn't ordinary for her. Swinging right, there was a little click on my side as we

grazed the fender of a stopped car. Rolling up the grade, we slipped between two taxis, clearing by an inch, and both hackmen yelled at her. Stopping for a light at the crest, she turned her head and spoke:

"It's my Uncle Dan. His name is Gale. He came last night and asked me—"

She fed gas and we shot forward, but a car heading uptown and squeezing the light was suddenly there smack in our path. With a lightning reflex her foot hit the brake, the other car zipped by with at least a foot to spare, she fed gas again, and the sedan jerked forward.

I asked her, "Taking the Highway?"

"Yes, it's quicker."

"It will be if you make it. Just concentrate on that and let the details wait."

She got to the downtown side of the highway without any actual contact with other vehicles, turned into the left lane and stepped on it. The speedometer said 55 when she spoke again.

"If I go ahead and tell you, I can't change my mind. He wanted me to persuade Bill to fix the game. He said he'd give us \$10,000. I didn't even want to tell Bill, but he insisted, so I did. I knew what Bill would say—"

She broke off to do some expert weaving, swerving to the middle lane, then a sprint, then swinging

back to the left again in front of a couple of cars that had slowed her down to under 50.

"Look," I told her; "you could gain up to two minutes this way with luck, but getting stopped and getting a ticket would take at least ten. You're driving, okay, but don't try to talk, too."

She didn't argue, but she held the pace. I twisted around to keep an eye on the rear through the window, and stayed that way clear to 57th Street. We rolled down the ramp and a block south, turned left on 56th Street, had a green light at Eleventh Avenue, and went through. A little short of Tenth Avenue we turned into the curb and stopped. Lila reached for the hand brake and gave it a yank.

"Let's hear it," I said. "Enough to go on. Is Uncle Dan a gambler?"

"No." Her face turned to me. "I'm afraid of him."

"Then what is he?"

"He runs a drugstore. He owns it. That's where we're going to see him. My father and mother died when I was just a kid, and Uncle Dan has been good to me—as good as he could. If it hadn't been for him I'd have been brought up in an orphans' home. Of course, Bill wanted to tell Art Kinney last night, but he didn't on account of me, and that's why he's not telling the cops."

"Maybe he is telling them, or soon will."

She shook her head. "I know Bill. We decided we wouldn't tell, and that settled it. Uncle Dan made me promise we wouldn't tell before he said what he wanted."

I grunted. "Even so, he was crowding his luck, telling you two about the program before signing you up. If he explained the idea of doping the Beebright—"

"But he didn't! He didn't say how it was to be done. He didn't get that far, because Bill said nothing doing, as I knew he would."

I eyed her. "This was last night?"

"Yes."

"What time?"

"Around 8 o'clock. We had dinner early with Helen and Walt Goidell, and when we got home Uncle Dan was there waiting for us."

"Where's home?"

"Our apartment on Seventy-ninth Street. He spoke to me alone first, and then insisted I had to ask Bill."

"And Bill turned him down flat?"

"Of course he did!"

"Bill didn't see him alone later?"

"Of course not!"

"All right, don't bite. I need to know. Now what?"

"We're going to see him. We're going to tell him that we have to tell the cops, and we're going to try to get him to come along. That's why I wanted you with me, because I'm afraid of him—I mean, I'm afraid he'll talk me out of it.

But they've got to know that Bill was asked to fix the game and he wouldn't. If it's hard on Uncle Dan that's too bad, but I can't help it. I'm for Bill, all the way."

I was making myself look at her, for discipline. I was having the normal male impulses at the sight and sound of a good-looking girl in trouble, and they were worse than normal because I was partly responsible. I had given her the impression that the cops were about set to take her Bill on the big one, which was an exaggeration. I hadn't mentioned that one reason they were keeping him was his reaction to the interest Nick Ferrone had shown in her, which of course had no bearing on anyone's attempt to fix a ball game. True, she had been in a mess before I had got to her, but I had shoved her in deeper. What she needed now was understanding and sympathy, and I was all she had. Which was I, a man or a detective?

"Okay," I said, "let's go see Uncle Dan."

The engine was running. She released the hand brake, fed gas, and we rolled. Three minutes got us to Eighth Avenue, where we turned downtown. The car slowed and she pulled in at the curb.

"There it is." She pointed. "Gale's Pharmacy."

It was ten paces down. There were lights in the window, but otherwise it looked drab. I got out and held the door, and she joined

me on the sidewalk. She put a hand on my arm.

"You're staying right with me," she stated.

"Absolutely," I assured her. "I'm good with uncles."

As we crossed to the entrance and went inside I was feeling not fully dressed. I have a routine habit of wearing a gun when I'm on a case involving people who may go to extremes, but, as I said, I do not go armed to ball games. However, at first sight of Daniel Gale I did not put him in that category. His drugstore was so narrow that a fat man would have had to squeeze between the soda-fountain stools and the central showcase, and that made it look long, but it wasn't. Five or six customers were on the stools, and the soda jerk was busy.

At the cosmetics counter on the left, a woman was being waited on by a little guy with a pale, tight-skinned face, wearing glasses.

"That's him," Lila whispered to me.

We waited near the door. Uncle Dan, concentrating on the customer, hadn't seen us. Finally the customer made her choice and, as he tore off paper to wrap the purchase, his eyes lifted and he saw Lila. Also, he saw me, beside her. He froze. He held it, rigid, for seconds, then came to, went on with the wrapping job, and was handed a bill by the customer. While he was at the cash register Lila and I crossed to the counter. As

he handed the woman her change, Lila spoke:

"Uncle Dan, I've got to tell you —"

She stopped because he was gone. Without speaking, he turned and made for the rear, disappeared behind a partition, and a door closed. I didn't like it, but didn't want to start a commotion by hurdling the counter, so I stepped to the end and circled, went to the door that had closed, and turned the knob. It was locked. There I was, out at first, unless I was prepared to smash the door in.

The soda jerk called, "Hey, Mac, come out of that!"

"It's all right," Lila told him. "I'm his niece—Mr. Gale is my Uncle Dan."

"I never saw you before, lady. . . . You, Mac, come out here where you belong! Whose uncle are you?"

A couple of the fountain customers gave him his laugh. Then the door I was standing by popped open and Uncle Dan was there, beside me.

"Henry!" he called.

"Right here!" the soda jerk called back.

"Take over for a while—I'll be busy. Come here, Lila, will you?"

Lila circled the end of the counter and approached us. There wasn't room enough to be gallant and let her pass, so I followed Gale through the door into the back room ahead of her. It was small,

and the stacks of shipping cartons and other objects took most of what space there was. The rows of shelves were crammed with packaged merchandise, except those along the right wall, which held labeled bottles. Gale stopped near the door, and Lila and I went on by.

"We don't want to be disturbed," Gale said, and bolted the door.

"Why not?" I inquired.

He faced me, and from a distance of five arms' lengths, with Lila between us, I had my first good view of the eyes behind the specs. They were cold and deadly.

"Because," he was telling me, "this is a private matter. You see, I recognized you, Mr. Goodwin. Your face is not as well known as your employer's, but it has been in the papers on several occasions, and you were in my mind on account of the news. The radio bulletins have included the detail that Nero Wolfe and his assistant were present and engaged by Mr. Chisholm. So when I saw you with my niece I realized we should talk privately. But you're an impulsive young man, and for fear you may not like what I say, I make conditions. I shall stay here near the door. You will move to that packing case back of you and sit on it, with your hands in sight and making no unnecessary movements. My niece will put the chair here in front of me and sit on it, facing you, between you and me. That way I will feel free to talk."

I thought he was batty. As a set-

up against one of my impulses, including a gun if I had had one, it made no sense at all. I backed up to the packing case and lowered myself, resting my hands on my knees to humor him. When Lila saw me complying she moved the chair, the only one there, as directed, and sat with her back to her uncle. He, himself, went to a narrow counter, picked up a bottle of colorless liquid, removed the glass stopper, held it to his nose, and sniffed.

"I do not have fainting spells," he said apologetically, "but at the moment I am a little unstrung. Seeing my niece here with you was a real shock for me. I came back here to consider what it might mean, but reached no conclusion. Perhaps you'll explain?"

"Your niece will. Tell him, Lila."

She started to twist around in the chair, but he commanded her: "No, my dear, stay as you were. Face Mr. Goodwin." He took another sniff at the bottle.

She obeyed. "It's Bill," she said. "They're going to arrest him for murder, and they mustn't. They won't, if we tell them how you offered to pay him for fixing the game and he wouldn't do it. He won't tell them, on account of me, so we have to. I know I promised you I wouldn't, but now I've got to. You see how it is, Uncle Dan; I've got to."

"You haven't told the police?"

"No. I thought the best way was to come and get you to go with me.

I was afraid to come alone, because I know how bad it will be for you, but it will be worse for Bill if we don't. Don't you see, Uncle—?"

"Keep your back turned, Lila. I insist on it. That's right; stay that way." He had been talking in an even low tone, but now his voice became thin and strained: "I'll tell you why I want your back to me—so I can't see your face. . . . Remember, Goodwin, don't move! . . . This is a bottle of pure sulphuric acid. I was smelling it just to explain why I had it; of course, it has no smell. I suppose you know what it will do. This bottle is nearly full, and I'm holding it carefully, because one drop on your skin will scar you for life. That's why I want your back to me, Lila. I'm very fond of you, and I don't want to see your face if I have to use this acid. If you move, Lila dear, I'll use it. Or you, Goodwin; especially you. I hope you both understand?"

His hand holding the bottle hovered inches above her head. She looked as if she might keel over, and I urged her, "Sit tight, Lila, and don't scream."

"Yes," Uncle Dan said approvingly. "I should have mentioned that. Screaming would be as bad as moving. I had to tell you about the acid before I discussed matters. I'm not surprised at your fantastic suggestion, Lila, because I know how foolish you can be, but I'm surprised at you, Goodwin. How could you expect me to consent to

my complete ruin? Did Lila persuade you that I am an utter fool?"

"I guess she must have," I admitted. "What kind of man are you?"

He proceeded to tell me, and I pretended to listen. I also tried to keep my eyes on his pale, tight-skinned face, but that wasn't easy, because they were fascinated by the bottle he was holding. Meanwhile, my brain was buzzing. Unless he was plain loony the only practical purpose of the bottle must be to gain time—and for what?

". . . and I will," he was saying. "This won't kill you, Lila dear, but it will be horrible, and I don't want to do it unless I have to. Only, you mustn't think I won't. You don't really know me very well, because to you I'm just Uncle Dan. You didn't know that I once had a million dollars and I was an important and dangerous man. There were people who knew me and feared me, but I was unlucky. I have gambled and made fortunes, and lost them. That affects a man's nerves. It changes a man's outlook on life. I borrowed enough money to buy this place, and for years I worked hard and did well—well enough to pay it all back. But that was my ruin. I owed nothing and had a little cash and decided to celebrate by losing \$100 to some old friends—just \$100, but I didn't lose. I won several thousand. After that I went on, and lost what I had won, and I lost this place.

"So I don't own this place; my friends do. They are very old friends, and they gave me a chance to get this place back. I'm telling you about this, Lila dear, because I want you to understand. I came to you and Bill with that offer because I had to, and you promised me, you swore you would tell no one. I have been an unlucky man, and sometimes a weak one, but I am never going to be weak again—Don't move!"

Lila, who had lifted her head a little, stiffened. I sat gazing at Gale. Obviously, he was stalling for time, but what could he expect to happen? It could be only one thing: he expected somebody to come. He expected help.

As soon as he had seen us he had scooted back here to phone somebody. Help was on the way, the kind of help that would deal with Lila and me efficiently and finally; and big-time gamblers who could provide ten grand to fix a game are just the babies to be ready with that kind of help.

Either he was loony or that was it. But then what? They might come any second; they might be entering the drugstore right now. Any second a knock on the door might come . . .

Gale was talking: "I didn't think you'd tell, Lila, after all I've done for you. You promised me you wouldn't. Now, of course, you've told Goodwin and it can't be helped. If I just tip this bottle—"

"Nuts," I said emphatically, but not raising my voice. "You haven't got it staged right." I had my eyes straight on his specs. "Maybe you don't want to see her face, but the way you've got her, with her back to you, it's no good. What if she suddenly ducked, and dived forward? You might get some on her clothes or her feet, but the chair would be in your way. Have you considered that? . . . Better still, what if she suddenly darted sideways in between those cartons? The instant she moved I'd be moving, too, and that would take her out of my path. She'd be taking a chance, but that would be better than sitting there waiting for the next act. Unquestionably, it would be better for her to go sideways—with her head down and her arms out. You see how bum your arrangement is? But if you make her turn and face you—"

She moved. She went sideways, to her left, her head down and her arms out, diving for the cartons.

I lost a tenth of a second because I hadn't dared to pull my feet back ready for the spring, but that was all I lost. I didn't leap, I just went, with all the force my leg muscles could give it. My target was the bottom of the left front leg of the chair, and I went in flat, face down, and had the leg before he could get under way. The impact of the chair knocked him back against the door, and I kept going and grabbed his ankle and jerked.

Of course, the bottle could have landed right on me, but I had to get him off his feet. As I yanked his ankle I kept my face down, and he tumbled. The next thing I knew I was on top of him, pinning him, with a grip on his throat, looking around for the bottle. It had never reached the floor. It had landed on a carton six feet to my right and lay there on its side, the stuff gurgling out. The floor slanted toward the wall, so no flood threatened me.

"Okay, Lila," I said. "I need help."

She was scrambling to her feet. "Did he—did it—?" She giggled.

"No. If you have hysterics I'll tell Bill. Slap yourself; I can't."

"But he—"

"Shut up. Company's coming and we've got to get out of here. I want some adhesive tape quick." She started looking on shelves and in drawers. "Watch your step," I told her. "That stuff's spreading to the floor. . . . When I said I was good with uncles I didn't mean uncles like him. He's a lulu. He—"

"Here it is."

"Good girl. Tear off a piece six inches long . . . that's it. Now across his mouth good and tight, diagonally. Now one the other way. . . . That ought to do it, thank you, nurse. Now find some nice sterile bandage."

She found that, too, and held his arms while I sat on his knees and tied his ankles. Then I fastened his wrists behind him and anchored

the strip of bandage to the handle of a locked drawer. I squatted for a look at the tape on his mouth, gave it a rub, stood up, went to the door, and pushed the bolt.

"Come on," I told her.

I opened the door and she passed through. I followed and pulled the door to. There were customers on the fountain stools, and Henry was selling a man a pack of cigarettes. I paused on my way to the street door to tell him that Mr. Gale would be out soon, then opened the door to Lila. On the sidewalk I told her to wait in the car while I made a phone call.

Up twenty paces was a bar and grill. I went in, found a phone booth, dialed Manhattan Homicide, asked for Sergeant Purley Stebbins, and got him. He wanted to know if I was still up at the ball park.

I told him no. "Where I am," I said, "is top secret. I'm giving you a hot one." I gave him the address of Gale's Pharmacy. "Get a prowler car there fast, and plenty of reinforcements. Gale, the owner, on information received, was the go-between for the gamblers who fixed the ball game. He's in the back room of his store, gagged and tied."

"Is *this* a gag?"

"No. The reason for the hurry is that I think Gale sent for a rescue squad to deal with certain parties who are no longer there, and it would be nice to get there in time to welcome them. So PD cars

should not park in front. Be sure to tell them not to step in the stuff on the floor that looks like water, because it's sulphuric acid. That's all. Got the address?"

"Yes. Where are you? And—"

"Sorry, I've got a date. This could make you a lieutenant. Step on it."

I went out and back to the car. Lila was on the driver's side, gripping the steering wheel with both hands.

"Move over," I said. "I'll do the driving this time."

She slid across, and I got in and pulled the door to. I sat. Half a minute went by.

"Where are we going?" she asked. Her voice was so weak I barely got it.

"Uptown. Where Bill is." Maybe he was.

"Why don't we start?"

"I phoned for cops. If others come before the cops do I want to get a look at them. In case I forget it later, I want to mention that that was a beautiful dive you made, and the timing couldn't have been better. I'm for you, only spiritually of course, since you're happily married."

"I want to get away from here. I want to see Bill."

"You will. Relax."

We sat, but not for long. It couldn't have been more than four minutes before a pair of cops swung around the corner, headed for the entrance to Gale's Pharmacy, and

entered. I pushed the starter button. . . .

It was only half an hour short of midnight when I stopped the car at the curb across the street from the main entrance to the ball park. The mob had dwindled to a few small knots, and of the long line of police cars only three were left. Two cops were having a tête-à-tête in front of the entrance.

Lila was a quick mover. She had got out and circled the car to my side by the time I hit the pavement. I gave her the ignition key and we were crossing the street when suddenly she let out a squawk and started to run. I took another step, and stopped. Bill Moyse was there, emerging from the entrance, with a dick on either side of him and one behind. Lila ended her run in a flying leap and was on him. The startled dicks grabbed for her, and the two uniformed cops started toward them.

I would have liked to deliver Lila to Wolfe, or at least to Hennessy, but there was a fat chance of tearing her loose from her second-string catcher. Also, I did not care to get hung up explaining to a bunch of underlings how I happened to be chauffeuring for Mrs. Moyse, so I detoured around the cluster, made it inside the entrance, and headed for the clubhouse stairs. Hearing heavy footsteps above, starting down, and voices, one of them Hennessy's, I slipped quietly behind a pillar.

Surely Stebbins had informed the Bronx of my phone call about the situation at Gale's Pharmacy, and so surely Hennessy would be inquisitive enough to want to take me along wherever he was going. I didn't risk peeking around the pillar, but, judging from the footsteps, there were four or five men. As soon as they had faded out I went on up the stairs. I was not chipper. I did not have Lila. I had been gone more than two hours. Wolfe might have gone home. They might all be gone.

But they weren't. Wolfe was in the clubroom, on the leather couch, and Chisholm was standing. As I entered, their heads turned to me.

"The police are looking for you," Wolfe said coldly.

"Uh-huh." I played it indifferent. "I just dodged a squad."

"Why did you go to that drug-store?"

I raised the brows. "Oh, you've heard about it?"

"Yes. Mr. Hennessy did, and he was kind enough to tell me." He was dripping sarcasm. "It is a novel experience, learning of your movements through the courtesy of a policeman."

"I was too busy to phone." I glanced at Chisholm. "Maybe I should report privately."

"This is getting to be a farce," Chisholm growled. His tie was crooked, his eyes were bloodshot, and he had a smear of mustard at the side of his mouth.

"No," Wolfe said, to me, not to Chisholm. "Go ahead. But be brief."

I obeyed. With the training and experience I have had I can report a day of dialogue practically verbatim, but he had said to be brief, so I condensed it, including all essentials.

"Then you don't know whether Gale was actually involved or not. When he failed with Mr. and Mrs. Moyse he may have quit trying." "I doubt it."

"You could have resolved the doubt. You were sitting on him. Or you could have brought him here."

I might have made three or four cutting remarks if an outsider hadn't been present. I stayed calm. "Maybe I didn't make it clear," I conceded generously. "It was ten to one he had phoned for help, the kind of help that would leave no doubts to resolve, and it might have come any second. Not that I was scared—I was too busy—but I wanted to see you once more so I could resign. I resign."

"Bosh." Wolfe put his hands on the leather seat for leverage and raised himself to his feet. "Very well. I'll have to try it."

Chisholm put in, "Inspector Hennessy said to notify him immediately if Goodwin showed up."

Wolfe wheeled on him, snarling. "Am I working for you? Yes! Notify Mr. Hennessy? Bah!" He turned and strode through the door that led to Art Kinney's office.

Chisholm and I fell in behind.

They were all in there. The four who were famous athletes didn't look very athletic just at present. Their sap had started draining with the first inning of that awful ball game, and it hadn't stopped for more than ten hours. Lew Baker, catcher, and Con Prentiss, short-stop, were perched on a desk. Joe Eston, third baseman, and Nat Neill, center-fielder, were on chairs.

Art Kinney, the manager, was standing over by a window. Doc Soffer was seated at Kinney's desk, bent over, with his elbows on his knees and his face covered by his hands. Beaky Durkin was propped against a table, saggy and bleary-eyed.

"It had better be good," someone said. I didn't know who, because I was placing a chair for Wolfe where he could see them all without straining his neck. When he was in it, with nothing to spare between the arms, I crossed to a vacant seat over by the radio. Chisholm was there, at my right.

Wolfe's head moved from side to side and back again. "I hope," he said grumpily, "you're not expecting too much."

"I'm through expecting," Kinney muttered.

Wolfe nodded. "I know how you feel, Mr. Kinney. All of you. You are weary and low in spirit. You have been personally and professionally humiliated. You have all been talked at too much. I'm sorry I

have to prolong it, but I had to wait until the police were gone. Also, since I have no evidence, I had to let them complete their elaborate and skilled routine in search of some. They got none. Actually, they have nothing but a druggist that Mr. Goodwin got for them."

"They've got Bill Moyse," Con Prentiss rumbled.

"Yes, but on suspicion, not on evidence. Of course I admit, because I must, that I am in the same fix. I, too, have a suspicion but no evidence, only mine is better-grounded. I suspect one of you eight men of drugging the drinks and killing Ferrone. What I—"

They made enough noise to stop him. He held up a palm.

"If you please, gentlemen. I have a question to put. I suspect one of you, but I have no evidence and no way of getting any speedily. That is why I asked Mr. Chisholm to keep you here for consultation with me after the departure of the police. I wanted to ask you: Do you want to help? I would like to tell you the reason for my suspicion and ask you to help me get evidence to support it. I think you can if you will. Well?"

"One of us?" Joe Eston demanded.

It was interesting to see them. Naturally, they all had an impulse, all but one, anyway, to look around at faces, but no two of them handled it exactly alike. Chisholm looked straight and full at each in

turn. Beaky Durkin sent quick little glances here and there. Doc Soffer, frowning and pursing his lips, turned his head slowly left to right.

"Go ahead!" Kinney blurted. "Have you got something or not?"

"Yes, I have something," Wolfe assured him, "But I don't know how good it is. Without your help it is no good at all."

"We'll help if we can. Let's hear it."

"Well. First the background. Were the two events—the drugging of the drinks and the murder—connected? The reasonable supposition is yes, until and unless it is contradicted. If they were connected, how? Did Ferrone drug the drinks, and did one of his teammates discover it and, enraged, go for him with the bat? It seems unlikely."

Wolfe focused on Beaky Durkin: "Mr. Durkin, you knew Ferrone better than anyone else. You discovered him and got him here. You were his roommate and counselor. You told me that because of his brilliant performance this season his salary for next year would be doubled; that his heart was set on winning today's game and the Series; that winning or losing meant a difference of some two thousand dollars to him personally; that his Series money would pay his debts, with some to spare; and that, knowing him intimately, you are positive that he could not have

been bribed to drug the drinks. Is that correct?"

"It sure is," Durkin was hoarse and cleared his throat. "Nick was a swell kid." He looked around as if ready for an argument, but nobody started one.

"Do any of you dispute it?" Wolfe asked.

They didn't.

"Then without evidence it is idiotic to assume that he drugged the drinks. The alternative, suppose that the two events were connected, is the reverse: that someone drugged the drinks and Ferrone knew or suspected it and was going to expose him, and was killed. That is how I see it. Call him X. X could have—"

"Don't beat around the bush," Kinney blurted. "Name him!"

"Presently. X could have put the drugged drinks in the cooler any time during the late morning, as opportunity offered. What led Ferrone to suspect him of skulduggery may not be known, but conjecture offers a wide choice. Ferrone's suspicion may have been only superficial, but to X any suspicion whatever was a mortal menace, knowing, as he did, what was going to happen on the ball field. When Ferrone questioned him he had to act. The two were, of course, in this room together, at the time the rest of you were leaving the clubroom for the field or shortly after. X was, as so many have been, the victim of progressive emergency. At first he

needed only money, and to get it he stooped to scoundrelism; but it betrayed him into needing the life of a fellow man."

"Cut the rhetoric," Chisholm snapped. "Name him."

Wolfe nodded. "Naming him is easy. But it is pointless to name him, and expose myself to an action for slander, unless I can enlist your help. As I said, I have no evidence. All I have is a fact about one of you, a fact known to all of you and to the police, which seems to me to point to guilt. But I admit that other interpretations are conceivable. You are better judges of that than I am, and I'm going to present it for your consideration."

He aimed his gaze at Baker and Prentiss, perched on a desk, raised a hand, slowly, and scratched the tip of his nose. His eyes moved to pin Doc Soffer. His head jerked to the left, to focus on Chisholm, and the right, to Beaky Durkin. He spoke:

"I'll illustrate my meaning. Take you, Mr. Durkin. You have accounted for yourself, but you have been neither contradicted nor corroborated. You say you left the clubhouse shortly before the team did and went to your seat in the grandstand."

"That's right." Durkin was still hoarse. "And I didn't kill Nick."

"I didn't say you did. I am merely expounding. You say you remained in your seat, watching the game, until the third inning, when you

were sent for by Mr. Chisholm to come to the clubhouse. That, too, is neither contradicted nor corroborated. Certainly you were there when you were sent for, but there is no proof that you had been there continuously since the game started and even before."

"I don't know about proof, but I was. I can probably find the guy that was sitting next to me."

"You didn't leave your seat once during that time?"

"I did not."

Wolfe looked around. "Well, gentlemen. That's the fact I can't explain. Can you?"

They were gawking at him. "Do we have to?" Baker demanded.

"Someone does." Wolfe's voice sharpened: "Consider the situation. Consider the relationship of those two men. The discovery of Ferrone is Durkin's proudest achievement as a baseball scout. He fosters him and treasures him. Today, now yesterday, at the game that was to be the climax of Ferrone's triumphant season, Durkin is in the clubroom and sees Ferrone there in uniform, with the others, young, sound, mighty, valiant. He leaves the clubhouse and goes to a seat in the grandstand. Before long the loud-speaker announces that Garth, not Ferrone, will play second base. Durkin keeps his seat. The players take the field, and the game starts, with no Ferrone. Durkin keeps his seat. They play the first inning badly. Durkin keeps his seat. They

play the second inning badly. Durkin keeps—"

"Good lord!" Art Kinney yelled.

"Exactly." Wolfe lifted a hand. "Please, gentlemen, keep your seats. It is clearly fantastic. The announcement that Garth would play second base could have been taken by Durkin merely as a blunder, but when they took the field without Ferrone his consternation would have been insupportable. The one thing he couldn't possibly have done was to stay in his seat. Why did you, Mr. Durkin?"

"I couldn't think—" He tried to clear his throat and almost choked. "What could I do?"

"I don't know. I said I can't explain what you did do, but I can try. Suppose the nonappearance of Ferrone was no surprise to you, because you knew where he was and what had happened to him. Suppose, further, you were in a state of severe systemic shock because you had murdered him. I submit that explanation of your keeping your seat is plausible. Can you offer any other?"

Durkin took two steps. "Look here," he said; "you can't sit there and accuse me of a thing like that. I don't have to stay and take it, and I'm not going to."

He started for the door, but Lew Baker was suddenly there in his path. "Back up, Beaky. I said back up!"

Beaky did so, literally. He backed until his rump hit the edge of the

table. He groped for support and braced himself.

Wolfe was grim. "I was supposing, Mr. Durkin, not accusing. But I am now ready to accuse, and I do. I explained, when I was calling you X, how and why you acted." His eyes moved. "Gentlemen, I ask you to look at him. Look at his face, his eyes. Look at his hands, clutching the table in dismay and despair. Yes, I accuse him. I say that that man drugged your drinks, caused you to lose your game, and, threatened with exposure, murdered your teammate."

They were all on their feet, including Art Kinney. They were making threatening sounds.

"Wait!" Wolfe said sharply, and they turned to him. "I must warn you, you approach him at your peril, for I have no proof. It will be gratifying to press a confession out of him, but a confession is not evidence, and we need some. I suggest that you try for it. He did it for money, and surely he was paid something in advance, unless he is a fool. Where is it? Certainly not on his person, since you have all been searched, but it is somewhere, and it would do admirably. Where is it?"

Lew Baker got to Durkin ahead of the others. He told him in a thin, tight voice, so tight it twanged, "I wouldn't want to touch you, Beaky, you dirty rat. Where is it? Where's the jack?"

"Lew, I swear to—"

"Skip it! You fixed us, did you? And Nick—you fixed him. I'd hate to touch you, but if I do—"

The others were there, Kinney and Doc Soffer with them, crowding in on Durkin, who had pulled back onto the table, still gripping the edge. I went to the end of the table and stood. They were all strong and hard, and their nervous systems had had a tough day. Aside from the killing of Nick Ferrone, this was the bird who had made them play ball like half-witted apes in the most important game of their lives, to an audience of fifty million.

"Give me room, fellows," Nat Neill said. "I'm going to plug him."

Durkin didn't flinch. His jaw was quivering and his eyes looked sick, but he didn't flinch.

"This is wrong," Con Prentiss said. "He wants us to hurt him. He'd like to be knocked cold. He's not a coward; he's just a snake."

"It's a moral question," Joe Eston said. "That's the way to handle it."

Art Kinney shouldered between two of them to get his face within ten inches of Durkin's. "Look, Beaky. You've been in baseball 30 years. You know everybody in the majors and we know you. What do you think's going to happen? Where could you light? We've got you here now and we're going to keep you. I'll send for the whole team. How will you like that?"

"I want a lawyer," Durkin said.

Neill roared. "He wants a law-

yer! I'm going to clip him!"

"No, Beaky, no lawyers," Kinney said. "I'll send for the boys and we'll lock the doors. Where's the money? Where is it?"

Durkin's head went forward, down. Kinney put a fist under his chin and yanked it up and held it. "No, you don't. Look at me. We've got you, but even if we didn't where could you go? Where are you going to sleep and eat?"

"Let me hold his chin," Neill requested. "I'll fix it for him."

"Shut up," Eston told him. "It's a moral question."

Kinney's fist was still propping Durkin's chin. "I think," he said, "the boys ought to have a look at you. They won't be sleeping anyhow, not tonight. Con, get on the phone and find them. You, too, Lew, the one in the clubroom. Get 'em here—get all of 'em you can. And tell them not to spill it. We don't want any cops yet."

"No!" Durkin squawked.

"No what, Beaky?" Kinney removed his fist.

"I didn't mean to kill Nick." He was slobbering. "I swear I didn't, Art. He suspected. He found out I bet a grand against us and he threw it at me. I brought him here to explain. But he wouldn't believe me and was going to tell you, and he got sore and came at me, and I grabbed the bat just to stop him, and when I saw he was dead—You've got to believe me, Art. I didn't want to kill Nick!"

"You got more than a grand for dopping the drinks."

"I'm coming clean, Art. You can check me and I'm coming clean. I got five grand and I've got five more coming. I had to have it, Art, because the bookies had me down and I was sunk. I was listed good if I didn't come through. I had it on me, but with the cops coming I knew we'd be frisked, so I ditched it. You see I'm coming clean, Art. I ditched it there in the radio. I stuffed it in through a slot."

There was a scramble and a race. Prentiss tangled with a chair and went down with it, sprawling. Nat Neill won. He jerked the radio around and started clawing at the back, but the panel was screwed on.

"Here," I said, "I've got a—"

He hauled off and swung with his bare fist; he yanked, and half the panel came off. He looked inside and started to stick his hand in, but I shouldered him, good and hard, and sent him sideways. The others were there, three of them, surrounding me.

"Well?" Wolfe called.

"A good, fat roll," I told him and the world. "The one on the outside is a C."

Beaky Durkin, left to himself on the table, suddenly moved fast. He was on his feet and streaking for the door. Joe Eston, who had claimed it was a moral issue, leaped for him as if he had been a blazing line drive trying to get by, got to

him, and landed with his right.

"That will do," Wolfe said, as one who had earned the right to command. "Thank you, gentlemen. Archie, get Mr. Hennessy."

I went to Kinney's desk and reached for the phone. At the instant my fingers touched it, it rang. So instead of dialing I lifted it and, feeling cocky, told it, "Nero Wolfe's Bronx office, Goodwin speaking."

"This is Inspector Hennessy. Is Durkin there?"

I said yes.

"Fine. Hold him, and hold him good. We cracked Gale and he spilled everything. Durkin is it. Gale got to him and bought him. You'll get credit for getting Gale—that'll be all right—but I'll appreciate it if you'll hold off and let it be announced officially. We'll be there for Durkin in five minutes."

"He's stretched out here on the floor. Mr. Wolfe hung it on him. Also, we have found a roll of lettuce he cached in the radio."

I hung up and turned to Wolfe: "That was Hennessy. They broke Gale and he unloaded. He gave them Durkin and they're coming for him."

"The trouble is this: Which of us crossed the plate first, you with your one little fact, or me with my druggist? You can't deny that Hennessy's call came before I started to dial him. How can we settle it?"

We can't. That was months ago, and it's not settled yet.

Ferenc Molnár

The Best Policy

A delightful surprise by the world-famous Hungarian dramatist who wrote the unforgettably enchanting "Liliom" and the wise and witty "The Guardsman"—the "clever, sophisticated, and cynical" writer who "speaks always in an ordinary tone of voice and thus lends to all his work an air of intimacy."

MONSIEUR BAYOUT, PRESIDENT OF the National Farmers Bank, sent for his secretary Philibert.

"Tell me, Philibert," he said, "who is this man Floriot down at our Perpignan branch?"

"Floriot? . . . That's the cashier. He's acting as manager temporarily. You remember, sir, the old manager, Boucher, died, and we haven't found anyone to put in his place yet. Floriot's looking after things meanwhile. There isn't very much business in Perpignan."

Monsieur Bayout took a letter from his desk. "Well, apparently he's robbing us. I've has this letter from Perpignan. It's anonymous, I admit, but . . ."

He handed Philibert a not very clean sheet of notepaper on which, in a somewhat unformed hand, the following lines were written:

To the President of the National Farmers Bank.

Dear Sir,

We farmers are putting our hard-earned savings in your bank at Per-

pignan, and one fine day we shall wake up and find it has gone bankrupt and all our savings are lost. It is bound to happen the way things are going on here. You probably don't know that the cashier, Monsieur Floriot, has been embezzling money for months past. He must have put away a tidy packet by now, but of course by the time you high and mighty gentlemen in Paris realize what's going on, all the money will be gone.

"Send an inspector down to Perpignan tomorrow, Philibert," the President said. "But tell him to be tactful, we don't want to upset the man. There's probably no foundation for the story."

Monsieur Floriot, temporary manager of the Perpignan branch, stared at the inspector from Paris with horrified amazement. "Inspect my books?" he echoed. "What, now? In the middle of the month? Without any notification? It's a bit unusual, isn't it?"

The inspector felt sorry for the agitated little man. "There's nothing to worry about, Monsieur Floriot. We do this at all our branches from time to time. The President gets these sudden fits. It's only a formality. I'll be through in half an hour."

"Yes, but people will talk, especially in a small place like this," Floriot wailed. "Everyone will be saying that I've been up to something shady. Think of the disgrace!"

"Nobody's going to know anything about it," the inspector said, a rifle impatiently. "That is, of course, unless you yourself talk. Well, can I see the books now?"

Two days later Philibert entered the President's room. "I'm able to report on the inspector's visit to Perpignan, sir. Everything in the books is in order. Not a single sou missing."

"Good. One really ought not to pay any attention to these disgusting anonymous-letter writers. Thanks, Philibert."

Less than a month later, the President again summoned his secretary. "It's quite ridiculous," he said testily. "But I've had another anonymous letter about Perpignan. The writer declares that the books weren't properly examined. Apparently Floriot made such a song and dance about the whole thing that an accomplice had time to replace the stolen money. We really ought to

have gone into the matter more thoroughly."

"Do we have to make another investigation?" Philibert asked ruefully.

The President drummed his fingers on the desk. "I don't like doing it. All the same, it's a duty we owe to our clients. If there is something in it, and people find out afterwards that we were warned, there'll be a nasty scandal. I'm afraid the only thing to do is send the inspector down again. And this time let him do the job thoroughly. I want to clear this up once and for all."

The same day three of the bank's most reliable inspectors set out for Perpignan. This time Monsieur Floriot was really taken by surprise. One of the officials kept guard over him, while the other two carried out a thorough examination of his accounts, lasting over four hours. They found nothing missing, and the books in perfect order.

"I only wish things were as satisfactory in all our branches," the chief inspector said, as he bade farewell to the completely shattered Floriot.

A week later: "Monsieur Floriot of Perpignan is waiting to see you, sir," Philibert announced.

Departing from his usual habit, Monsieur Bayout rose and advanced towards his visitor with an outstretched hand.

Floriot, however, gave a stiff little

bow. "I've come to hand in my resignation, sir," he said.

"Your resignation? You can't mean that, my dear Floriot. Why?"

"You found it necessary to have my books examined twice running, sir. Naturally it caused a lot of talk. Even though I was proved to be an honest man, it made a bad impression. People are saying there must have been some good reason why the head office sent down twice to have my affairs investigated. My reputation's gone. I'm not a young man, and I have a wife to think of."

Monsieur Bayout was deeply moved. "I'll make it my personal responsibility to see that your name is cleared. Wait a minute, though. . . . The manager's job is still vacant, would you like to have it? No one could doubt your honesty then, could they? Yes, and you'll get a

substantial increase in salary, too.

"You really mean . . ." Florio stammered.

"Of course, of course, my dear fellow. The bank will be fortunate in keeping the services of so conscientious a worker."

Back at his home in Perpignan Pierre Floriot slid his feet into the comfortable felt slippers his wife handed him.

"At last!" he grunted, in a good humored voice. "What's the use of being an honest man if nobody hears of it? I might have gone on being a cashier for years and years and the people at the head office would never have known how honest I was."

"They know now!" Madame Floriot beamed, regarding her husband with admiration. "Those letters were a wonderful idea of yours!"



Mary Roberts Rinehart

Four A.M.

Mrs. Rinehart founded the Had-I-But-Known school (an inspired "tag" credited to Ogden Nash) in 1908—how long ago that now seems! The Had-I-But-Known style, like all feminine styles, changed with the years, but in principle it still dominates a certain type of mystery fiction in "slick" magazines. Here is a fine example of Mrs. Rinehart's later technique . . .

IT WAS ON THE DAY THE NEW INTERN arrived that Anne Elizabeth Ward's problems began, for it was on that day that Anne Elizabeth went on night duty. It seemed unimportant at the time, except that she could never sleep in the daytime, what with the noises in the street, the other nurses moving through the dormitory hall, and the ambulance going out with its siren shrieking.

Also, as her hours were from midnight to eight in the morning, it gave her a good many empty evenings, especially as Miss Winifred Ogden—privately known as Winnie—ran her training school rather like a convent.

But it only seemed unimportant. As a matter of fact, Anne Elizabeth did not care for interns, having divided them between the ones who made passes at her and the others—she had been at this hospital two years—who did not. Nor did she particularly care for duty where private patients had their rooms.

Yet it was the new intern, George Swayne, who helped her solve the murder in the house across the street. And it was the restless woman in Room 12 who proved to be mixed up in it. The chief of police, however, gave all the credit to Anne Elizabeth.

"But it was really very simple," she told the chief later. "You see I'd lived in the country every summer for years."

She liked her nursing job in this small town. She especially liked working in the wards—and the wards liked her. Even the women's, which was unusual. She would trot in briskly in the morning and survey the rumpled beds, and the faces all turned to her.

"Well, how's everything? Been good in here last night?"

They would smile at her, these people who came from every walk of life, having only certain things in common: sickness and poverty and dependence on private charity. And she would smile back.

Quite often she was alone, for nurses were scarce. Then the ambulatory cases would try to help her, changing the beds and dumping the piles of linen down the chute, or carrying water and bedpans. But now Winnie had put her on night duty on the Front, and private patients usually slept from midnight to eight A. M. If they did not, they raised a row and got a sleeping pill from their own doctors.

So Anne Elizabeth had two weeks of boredom before she ever even saw George Swayne. She had heard about him, of course—that he was tall and good-looking. One thing she could not know about, however, was the interview between him and Winnie on the morning after his arrival.

He had breezed into the office to find Miss Ogden sitting in a sort of awful majesty behind her desk.

"Morning, Aunt Winnie," he said, and grinned at her. "Who would have thought years ago, when you saw me in diapers, or without them

"That's enough, George," she said coldly. "In the first place my name is Winifred, not Winnie, and hereafter please remember that I am Miss Ogden to you. Our relationship is a private matter."

"Good heavens, Aunt Winnie!" He gave her a horrified look. "Don't tell me I was not a wanted child. The parents certainly never gave me that impression."

Winnie gave him a long, calcu-

lating look. He was exactly what she most dreaded, a good-looking young man who would undoubtedly play hell with her nurses. Not that she put it that way, but at sixty, and after forty years of nursing, she could see trouble when it was six feet tall, had an engaging smile, and wore fresh hospital whites.

"You understand, of course, that the relationship between you and my nurses is purely professional," she said. "I hope you will observe that rule."

He looked surprised. "Mean to say I can't take one out now and then?" he inquired. "No nice dark movies? No walks in the park? I thought all that nonsense went out years ago, along with carbolic sprays in the operating room."

"I was trained in that period," she said stiffly. "It may interest you to know that quite a number of our patients recovered. Also that the nurses managed to survive, without the assistance of the medical staff."

"Another thing," she went on. "This is not a large hospital, but I want no patronizing on that account. And I hope you will attend strictly to your duties here. As you are alone, you will have plenty to do."

He remembered that later, but at the moment he merely saw her looking at the clock on the desk, so he got up. "Thanks for the warnings," he said. "I'll be a good boy. And I guess that's all. Good morning, Miss Ogden."

"Good morning, George."

"Dr. Swayne, if you please," he said politely, and went out.

It was still early. He wandered into the empty board room and looked out at Fremont Street, on which the hospital windows opened. It was obviously a slum district, or worse. There was only one exception to the general frownsiness of the row of houses opposite. One of them looked neat and cared for. It had a service alley at the side and, even as he looked, an elderly woman came out with a pail and proceeded to scrub the front steps.

It interested him only mildly, which seemed curious later. . . .

He spent the next two weeks inspecting his modest new terrain and being a very busy young man. So naturally he never saw Anne Elizabeth and, when he did discover her, neither was at his or her best. He was wearing an old dressing gown over crumpled pajamas, with his bare feet thrust into ancient bedroom slippers. And Anne Elizabeth's bun had slipped, as had her cap, and anyhow she was only a shadow in the dim corridor.

"It's the patient in Room 12, Doctor," Anne Elizabeth said. "She refuses to stay in bed. I'm sorry I had to call you, but I can't do anything with her."

"Refuses to stay in bed? What does she do?"

"Stands by the window, looking out into the street. Not that *that*

makes so much difference, but she's so jumpy and queer, I wish you'd take a look at her."

"All right," he said.

The woman in Room 12 was standing by the window in her nightgown. He approached her in his best professional manner. "Just what seems to be the matter?" he said. "Can't you sleep? Or what is it?"

The woman stared at him desperately. She was a handsome creature, in her late thirties, he judged, but she was jerking with nerves.

"I have a right to stand by the window, haven't I?" she demanded. "This stupid nurse acts as if I'm committing a crime."

"The nurse is right," Swayne said. "I'm sure your own doctor wouldn't approve, either." He took her by the arm and turned her away from the window. She allowed herself to be led back to bed, but suddenly, as a truck passed on the street outside, she sat bolt upright.

"What time is it?" she asked unexpectedly. "My clock's stopped."

"Almost four. How long have you been awake?"

She did not answer him. Instead, she clutched the covers convulsively. "Four o'clock!" she said. "My God, I can't just *sit* here and think about—! I've got to get up."

She thrust her legs out of the bed and kicked at Anne Elizabeth when she tried to put them back. "Let me alone," she said violently. "Let me

get up. I have to get up, I tell you!"

"What for?" asked Anne Elizabeth.

"That's none of your business," the woman snapped.

"I think I'll have a talk with your doctor," Swayne said. "In the meantime, stay in bed and try to rest, won't you?"

Anne Elizabeth followed him out of the room, and he glanced at her without interest.

"Better get the key out of her closet," he said. "Lock up her clothes before she decides to run out on us altogether. What's the matter with her?"

"I don't know," said Anne Elizabeth. "She's been restless ever since she came in. She's in and out of bed all night. Then she sleeps all morning."

Swayne called the woman's physician after that, but he was not helpful. "Of course she can't wander about at this hour," he said. "Give her a sedative. There's a standing order for it."

But actually he knew very little about her.

"Doesn't belong in town," he said. "She walked into my office looking like the wrath of God, and said she hadn't slept for weeks. The hotel was full, and she wanted to go to the hospital anyhow. She seemed to know Room 12 was empty, so I sent her in a couple of days ago."

When Anne Elizabeth came back she found Swayne at the window

of the convalescent parlor a little beyond her desk, and followed him there.

"She wouldn't take her pill," she said. "She won't stay in bed, either. But I got the key. She can't get her clothes."

He glanced at her. It was still merely a glance. He seemed puzzled. "I wish you'd tell me," he said, "why a woman has to stare out of the window just because it's four o'clock in the morning."

"I wouldn't know. I often feel like that myself."

He eyed her. It was practically the first time he had really seen her. What he saw was a girl who looked exhausted and bored to tears, and who was endeavoring to tidy her cap and the bun of rather nice hair on her neck.

"Don't like night duty, do you?"

"I don't sleep much," she told him. "The street's quiet now, but in the daytime it's dreadful."

"Speaking of the street," he said, "how do you account for that house over there? It doesn't seem to belong."

She joined him at the window. "I know. I often look at it. I'm not supposed to leave the desk, but I slip in here sometimes and look out. It helps me keep awake. And I can see the dawn coming. First, the milkman's horse comes down the street. That's early, of course. About four o'clock, but at least the worst is over."

Dr. Swayne thought rather guilt-

ly of his waiting bed, and impulsively he put a hand on Anne Elizabeth's shoulder. "It sounds like a hell of a job," he said. "Ever think about four A. M.? Cities dead to the world, and life at its lowest? Even the well slow down, and the sick die."

"I know that. I've been here two years."

She left him to glance along the corridor. But Twelve's light was not on, and when she came back he was still at the open window. She stood beside him, breathing in the fresh spring air.

The street was quiet, except for a man staggering into one of the tenelements and a milk wagon at the corner. Then, as if he had emerged from nowhere, a figure appeared in the shadows. It kept carefully away from the street light, and to Swayne's surprise it stopped at the house across the street. He could see then that it was a man in a dark suit and evidently wearing rubber-soled shoes, for his movements were quick and silent.

He was no burglar, however, for after glancing about him he took a key from his pocket and let himself in at the front door.

"Surreptitious, I call it," Swayne said idly.

"Well, he *is* late, at that," Anne Elizabeth observed. "He's usually out only an hour or so."

"What does he do? Walk the dog?"

"There isn't any dog. I suppose

he has insomnia. I've seen him several times."

They still stood at the window. Swayne felt an odd reluctance to leave her there. This was no job for a girl, he thought, this night stuff, and for the first time he was aware of his bare ankles and the crumpled legs of his pajamas under the old dressing gown.

"I must look fine," he said, and ran a hand over his heavy hair. "But I hate like the devil to leave you here alone with that woman. I'll look in on her and——"

He did not have a chance to finish. The silence outside was broken by a sharp explosion, and Swayne, who had been in the Army, knew what it was.

"Gun shot!" he said. "Much of that around here?"

"Now and then," she said. "Someone gets drunk and fires at something or other. It generally doesn't mean anything. But that sounded close."

It had been close. Fremont Street was still empty and quiet, but a moment or so later the door of the house opposite opened, and they saw the figure of a woman emerge. While they watched she stumbled down the steps, only to collapse on the pavement.

Swayne did not hesitate. "Keep an eye on the place," he said. "It looks like trouble. Watch if anyone else comes out." And with that he flung himself out of the parlor and down the long staircase. On a bench

in the lower hall Alec, the night porter, was sleeping placidly, but the doctor did not rouse him.

The woman still lay on the pavement. Above her the door stood open, but there was no light in the hall. She had not been shot, however. So far as Dr. Swayne could determine she had merely fainted or perhaps fallen and struck her head. He was puzzled. Nobody had appeared from the house, and the silence seemed almost sinister. As he stooped over her he saw that she was the elderly maid who scrubbed the steps, and that she wore a thin negligee over her nightgown.

He glanced back at the hospital. Anne Elizabeth was still at the window, and he waved a hand at her. Then he picked up the unconscious woman, carried her into the dark hall of the house, and looked around for some place to put her. There was nothing, however, so he laid her gently on the floor.

Except for a thin gleam of light from the end of the hall, the place was completely dark. He felt his way back, aware of a faint sound from there, and found himself in a brightly lighted kitchen, with a plainly dressed, middle-aged woman, who was staring down at something lying on the floor.

What lay there was the body of a man. It did not need the thin stream of blood on the linoleum or the flat relaxation of the prostrate figure to indicate to Swayne that he was probably dead. He was lying

face down, and under one of his hands lay an automatic pistol. Swayne felt the pulseless wrist and stood up. He was almost certain that it was the man who had entered the house fifteen minutes before.

The woman was still frozen in the same position.

"What happened?" Swayne said.

"He's dead, isn't he?"

"Yes. Who is he?"

She turned a horror-stricken face toward him. "He said his name was Johnson. He had a room here." Then, seeming to regain her composure, she went on. "I don't know anything about him. He'd only been here two weeks or so. How did I know he was going to kill himself?"

Swayne watched her.

"I heard the shot and came down," she explained. "I found him just as he is."

"Are you usually dressed at this hour?"

She looked startled. "My father is sick. I sleep on a sofa in his room."

It looked all right. A plain case of suicide. But one of the axioms of suicide was that people who killed themselves with pistols blew out their brains, and this man had been shot through the heart. Swayne, however, did not mention it.

"There's a woman in the hall," he said. "She fell on the pavement and knocked her head. I put her on the floor. Somebody had better look after her."

"Olga!" she said. "She must have found him first. Her room is on this floor. Is she hurt?"

"No. I'm a doctor from the hospital across the street. I heard the shot and——"

But she was not listening. She darted out to the hall, leaving him alone with the body, and he made a further examination. There were no powder burns. The bullet had gone through the man's buttoned coat. Swayne looked around the room. The refrigerator door was open, and there was a plate of cheese on the table and a loaf of bread, as though someone had been about to make a sandwich. But there was the gun, lying under his hand, and Swayne eyed it.

It was a queer setup for suicide, he thought, and a queerer one for murder. In any event the police had to be notified, and he went out into the hall again. The light was on now, and Olga was sitting in a chair, with the woman standing beside her.

"Got a telephone?" he inquired. "I'll have to call the police."

He looked at the two women. Olga had not spoken. She still looked dazed. The other woman shook her head. "Not any more," she said. "We used to have a telephone. But not any more."

Swayne ran a hand through his hair. "This dead man," he said. "He just came into the house, didn't he?"

"I wouldn't know."

"Did he go out every night?"

"He slept most of the day. I suppose he went out sometimes. Don't ask me about his habits. I can't tell you anything. I'm going to take Olga to my room."

He watched as she helped Olga up the stairs. Then he went back to the kitchen. The door to the yard was closed, and he opened it and stepped outside. The place was neatly kept, and high fences shut it off from its unwholesome neighbors.

He went back and again stooped over the dead man. This time he noticed something he had not seen before. A half-eaten piece of cheese lay under the table, and he inspected it without touching it. So the suicide had been eating a light meal before departing this life!

He knew that he should call the police, but he was reluctant to leave the house. He felt confident that, if he did, some vital evidence might be tampered with—the refrigerator door closed, the food put away, the cheese on the floor retrieved. He did not fully trust the landlady.

He glanced at the open kitchen door. Suppose the dead man had opened it for air while eating his snack, and someone had been lurking in the service alley beside the house.

He stepped into the yard again, but before he could reach the alley, a man came briskly through it, carrying a wire rack of milk bottles. He stopped abruptly when he saw

Swayne. Then he grinned. "Kinda startled me," he said. "Up pretty early, aren't you?"

He stopped to put a couple of bottles on the doorstep. Then he glanced inside and straightened up quickly. "Anything wrong?" he inquired. "Man there sick?"

"Dead," Swayne said laconically. "Maybe suicide. I don't know."

"Gawd!" said the milkman. "Well, they will do it. Anything I can do?"

Swayne hesitated. His odd reluctance to leave the body persisted. In the silence he could hear the slow deliberate steps of a horse outside.

"Well, you might do something," he said. "I'm a doctor from the hospital across the street. If you'd go over there and telephone the police——"

"Sure will. Or better still, I hear my wagon outside. Old Dobbin knows his route all right. I'm going past the station house when I leave here. I can stop there."

He hurried out, and Swayne heard the horse start off. Alone, he took a package of cigarettes from the pocket of his dressing gown, lighted one, and, sitting down, surveyed the body.

The man was probably in his fifties, his dark hair gray over his ears. From what could be seen of his face he had been good-looking, and certainly the outstretched hands had done no manual labor. The dark suit was good, too. Swayne had a strong desire to go through

his pockets, but he repressed it. That would be a police matter. The gun, he thought, was a .38 automatic, but he could see only a part of it.

The police were slow in coming. It had been twenty minutes since the milkman had gone for them, and Dr. Swayne was reaching a high pitch of indignation when the doorbell finally rang. Even then no uniformed officer met his gaze. Instead, it was Alec from the hospital.

"Sorry, Doctor," he said. "But Miss Ward sent me over. One of her patients has been acting crazy. Ran down the stairs in her nightgown and was almost out of the door when I caught her. Fought like a wildcat."

"When was that?"

"Maybe half an hour ago. I don't know exactly. She's still hysterical, and the nurse thinks you'd better see her."

Swayne was worried. "I can't go immediately," he said. "Tell the nurse to give her a sedative. I have to wait for the police. There's been a shooting here. And listen, Alec. Call the station house and tell them to hurry."

Alec nodded and went back across the street. Swayne saw that there was a light in Room 12, and it worried him. But he was still doggedly determined to stay with the body until the police took over, which they did soon after.

A cruise car drove up, and two

men got out. Their deliberation annoyed Swayne as he let them in.

"Took you long enough," he said. They looked at each other.

One said, "I'd put it at three minutes, Jim. How about you?"

"Three minutes!" Swayne said. "I sent a man around there half an hour ago. There's no telephone here that I could use, so when this fellow came in with the milk I got him to go."

"With the milk!" Once more they looked at each other, and Jim spoke. "He didn't make it, chum," he said. "Got conked on the head with one of his own bottles. Dead when we found him."

"Then," Swayne said grimly, "I think you have two murders on your hands. Come back here, and I'll show you one."

But before he led them to the kitchen he glanced up at the hospital. The light in Room 12 was out at last, and he felt relieved.

It was full daylight when he went back to the hospital, but he did not go to his room. He went up to where Anne Elizabeth, looking white and exhausted, sat at her desk going over her charts. "Hear you had some trouble," he said. "Sorry I couldn't help. She quiet now?"

"Yes. She's asleep."

"What got into her? Did she say?"

"Well, she said she'd heard the shot and that she had to leave. I'd locked up her clothes, so she started

without them. Of course Win—Miss Ogden heard the noise on the stairs and came out. I guess I'm in trouble, all right."

"You leave Winnie to me," he said firmly. "And for heaven's sake get some sleep today. Look here, you were at the window while I was going down the stairs. Did anyone come out of that house when I went in—out of the house or through the service alley?"

"No one. Nobody at all."

He told her the story then, or as much as he knew. But she remained positive. No one had left the house when the doctor went in. She had stayed at the window—only now and then glancing out the door to see if any lights were on—until she heard the fuss in the hall below and leaned over the stair rail to see Alec struggling with the woman.

"Looks as though it's an inside job, then," he commented. "But who killed the milkman, and why? Who knew he was getting the police?"

He looked down at her. The bun on her neck was loose again, and she looked as though she didn't care. He reached out and this time put a rather more than brotherly hand on her shoulder. "See here, forget all this, won't you? It's no skin off your nose. And I'll fix Winnie. Don't worry."

He left her there and went along the hall to Room 12. The woman there was asleep, lying sprawled in the coma of drugs and complete ex-

haustion. He stood for some time looking down at her. Why had she been at the window the night before? What had a shot in the dark meant to her? And why on earth had she tried to escape from the hospital?

For the first time he wondered if she were somehow connected with the house across the street.

He glanced around the room. On the maple bureau lay the silver toilet articles from a fitted traveling bag, and he picked up a brush. He saw that while the chart had given her name as Hamilton, the initials on the brush were E. B. He raised his eyebrows at that. Not smart, he thought. A clever woman would have called herself Brown.

He was still puzzled as he made his way to his room. Around him the hospital was slowly waking. Back along the wards the night nurses were carrying basins for the washing before the early break fasts, and convalescents were shuffling about to bathrooms.

Across the street, two police cars were still parked, and Dr. Swayne was aware that before long he would be wanted by the law. He got a cup of coffee from a diet kitchen, took a bath, shaved, and dressed in fresh whites for the day. While he went through the routine he was mildly envying Anne Elizabeth, who had nothing to do that day but go to bed.

Had he known it, however, Anne Elizabeth was doing nothing of the

sort. She was in bed, true enough, but sleep was far from her. She was going over the events of the night, one by one: the shot, the silent house, and then the emergence of the old woman and her collapse.

But there was something nagging in the brain under the nice hair spread out over her pillow. There was something wrong with the picture as she had seen it. Every now and then she thought she had it, but then it faded and there she was, wide awake in her bare little room, with her laundry bag hanging on the closet door, her discarded uniform over a chair, and the daylight noises of the town coming in through the window.

She had finally dozed off when Winnie's assistant barged in and roused her. She was breathless and looked excited. "Awfully sorry, Ward," she said. "You're wanted in the board room. It's the police."

Anne Elizabeth, still half asleep, looked at her dazedly. "Police?"

"That man across the street. They think you may have seen something."

The chief of police was waiting in the board room, the chief and Winnie. The chief looked bluff and fatherly, but Winnie looked most unpleasant.

"My nurses need their sleep," she was saying. "What can Miss Ward have seen? She was supposed to be at her desk."

She gave Anne Elizabeth what can only be called a dirty look, but

the chief, who had daughters of his own, saw only a young nurse who looked scared and rather touching.

He told Anne Elizabeth to sit down, and gave her what he hoped was a pleasant smile. "Only want to know what you saw from that parlor window, Miss," he said. "Understand young Swayne asked you to watch. Anybody go in except the man who was killed?"

"No. Nobody went in or came out while I was watching."

"How long did you watch after Swayne went over?"

"I don't really know." She glanced at Winnie, who was obviously fuming. "I was sleepy, and I was standing by the window to get some air when the man went in. The shot came soon after. Only a few minutes."

"The doc was there with you at the window?"

"Yes. I had called him. One of the patients was nervous. And couldn't sleep."

The chief sat back, considering. "Just how long were you there at the window after Swayne left?"

Anne Elizabeth gave a despairing glance at Winnie. "I don't know exactly. Not very long. You see, we had this disturbance with a patient and——"

"Then you didn't even see the milkman?"

"No. I heard the noise on the stairs and ran out."

He grunted and got up. "Well, thanks, Miss," he said.

He went out, leaving Anne Elizabeth to a Winnie who was divided between fury at George and rage at Anne Elizabeth.

"Never before," she said, "never before has a patient in this hospital been allowed almost to escape. And in a nightgown, at that."

But Anne Elizabeth had recovered some spirit. "I was acting on Dr. Swayne's orders," she said stiffly. "Besides I had locked up her clothes. What more could I do?"

"I shall place the matter before the board," said Winnie majestically. "I cannot have scandal in my training school, and I shall tell them so. In the meantime I am taking you off duty, at least temporarily."

And it was then, for some reason, that Anne Elizabeth knew what was wrong with the picture, knew what that missing piece of the puzzle was. And the sudden knowledge startled her so that she simply turned her back on an outraged Winnie and walked out of the room.

She found Swayne in the pharmacy, and beckoned to him urgently. He looked pleased as well as relieved when he saw her.

"Thought you were asleep," he said. "I could do with some shut-eye myself. What's up, anyhow?"

"I want you to do something for me," she said. "Can you get out for an hour or so?"

"What for?"

"Well, I think you ought to pay a

visit to the morgue," she said.

He was bewildered. "But why?" he demanded. "I saw the fellow myself, and he was dead as a door-nail."

She shook her head. "I don't mean that corpse," she said. "I mean the other one—the milkman."

"But why——" he began.

"Don't ask me now," she begged. "I could be so wrong. I've just got a hunch, that's all. Just say you'll do this for me. Take a look at that milkman. Please!"

She looked so tired and worried that he decided to humor her, being divided between a sudden impulse to kiss her and a strong feeling that she should be put to bed.

"All right," he said, "but I'll make one condition. If you're officially off duty you're going to the movies with me tonight. And to hell with the board and Winnie!"

Anne Elizabeth did not go back to bed after that. She was too excited, and besides it was late. She took a walk instead. The police cars had disappeared from the house across the street, but the usual crowd of women and children and a few men were being kept back by a uniformed officer.

She bought an evening paper on her way home. The headlines, black and sensational, told of a double killing. The story described the discovery of the body of a man shot to death in the kitchen of a house at 2419 Fremont

Street. It went on to say that he had given his name to Miss Alice Williamson, who had rented him a room there, as Arthur Johnson. The police discounted the possibility of suicide, although the weapon was found under his hand. The shot had been fired from a distance of several feet, and other evidence pointed to murder. This suspicion was heightened by the brutal killing of an employee of a local milk company who was struck on the head by one of his own bottles while on his way to notify the police. The body was found in an alleyway only a block or so away from the station house.

The Williamson family claimed to know nothing about Johnson save that he was a quiet tenant. Apparently unable to sleep, he had taken an early morning walk. And was shot from the yard through the open kitchen door. The police, who suspected that the name Johnson was an alias, were still investigating.

Anne Elizabeth re-read the article. Then she folded the newspaper, took a coin from her purse and went to a corner drugstore and called the chief.

He seemed rather puzzled at first. "Who?" he asked. "Who is this?"

"It's Anne Elizabeth Ward, from the hospital," she said. "I talked to you today. Don't you remember?"

"Oh!" he said, his voice taking on a paternal note. "Sure I do. I

don't forget a pretty girl as easy as that. Got another killing up your sleeve?"

But humor did not appeal to her at the moment. "I just thought of something," she said breathlessly. "The patient in Room 12—she might be able to tell you something."

"Why? What's she got to do with it?"

"I think she was watching him. She used to stand by her window quite a bit at night. We had trouble keeping her in bed."

The chief chuckled. "Quite the little sleuth, aren't you?" he said.

"Well, she tried to get out of the hospital right after the shot was fired."

"The dickens she did!" said the chief, and hung up in a hurry.

Anne Elizabeth was not surprised, when she reached the hospital again, to find him there before her. He had evidently been to Room 12, and now he was in the telephone booth in the lower hall, shouting orders and scowling ferociously.

He was still scowling when he came out. "I want to talk to you," he said slowly. "What's the idea, holding out on me? Do you know who that woman in Room 12 is?"

"Why, yes," said Anne Elizabeth. "Her name is Hamilton—"

"Her name is Baird," said the chief bluntly, "and she's the wife of the man who got himself mur-

dered across the street. I just got part of the story out of her."

Anne Elizabeth simply stared.

"The murdered man was Herbert Baird," the chief went on. "Remember him? . . . No, you'd have been on roller skates at that time. Well, Baird was suspected of looting his own bank, ten years ago. He got off, but his cashier, a guy named Richards, took the rap."

"Month ago, Richards escaped, an embittered and dangerous guy. According to Baird's wife, he'd threatened to kill him, and Baird was scared to death. He left home and holed up across the street. Refused to let his wife stay with him—didn't want her to share the danger. But she knew where he was, and she took a room here so she could keep an eye on him and be near him."

The chief exhaled a lungful of smoke. "Sounds screwy, I know, but that's how dames are. She was half crazy with fear and worry. Had good reason to be, the way things turned out. Well, when she heard the shot, naturally she tried to get to him."

He gave Anne Elizabeth a hard look. "What I can't understand is—how did Richards get away with it? Assuming he tracked Baird to his hide-out and ambushed him, how did he get away? If he put the gun in Baird's hand, he must have been there, in the kitchen. Dr. Swayne got there in a minute. And you say nobody came out. Where

did he go? How did he get out and slug the milkman?"

He crushed out his cigarette angrily. Then, evidently feeling that he'd talked too much, he started to leave, but something in her face made him turn back. "Blast it all," he said, "you've still got something in that little head of yours, haven't you? Let's have it."

"Oh, it wasn't much," she said. "I was just wondering what became of the milkman's horse."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Nothing, I suppose. He'd just follow his route as usual, and then go back to his stable. They're creatures of habit, horses."

There was suspicion all over him, but she refused to say any more.

"I'd like to see Dr. Swayne first," she said. "It's just an idea."

The chief let her go reluctantly, and it was an hour later when she was called to Winnie's office. She put on some lipstick and combed her hair, which was her way of preparing for battle. But she looked quiet enough when she went in, although the chief was apoplectic.

"Just what is all this?" he belated. "Where is Swayne? And why are we waiting for him?"

Fortunately Swayne came in at that moment, and Anne Elizabeth gave him a quick glance. "Was I right?"

"Right as rain," he said, and went over to stand more or less protectively beside her. "Nice piece of work," he said admiringly.

"All right, all right!" said the chief furiously. "When you two get through solving this case you might let me know."

Anne Elizabeth smiled a little. "It's all a matter of knowing about horses."

"Horses!" shouted the chief. "What the devil have horses got to do with two murders?"

"Well, to begin with, the milk wagon was turned the wrong way," she explained carefully. "When I first saw it—before the shooting—it was just standing at the corner, facing up the street. But always before that it came down. I knew something was wrong—and that was it."

"And what," said the chief, remembering his blood pressure and controlling himself, "does that mean? Unless you are saying the horse went in and did the shooting."

"Of course not. But after I remembered that the milk wagon was facing the wrong way, I asked Dr. Swayne to go to the morgue."

The chief clutched his forehead. "The morgue?" he roared. "What the devil has the morgue got to do with it? Swayne had already seen the corpse."

"Not this one," she said gently. "I mean the real milkman. Dr. Swayne says the man he saw in the morgue is not the one who offered to go to the police for him. I guessed the real milkman was not driving the wagon."

The chief took out a large bandana handkerchief and mopped his face with it. "All right," he said. "Go on. Tell me how Richards got into the place and out again. I suppose you know that too!"

She gave him an apologetic look. "Well," she said, "he probably watched so he'd know Mr. Baird's habits—that he took a walk before dawn and got himself something to eat when he came back. But this isn't a good neighborhood. The police keep a pretty careful eye on it. It mightn't be easy to get into that house. But he'd seen the man delivering the milk, and that gave him the idea. Nobody notices a milkman anyhow."

The chief stared at her. "Are you saying he killed a man just to take his place?"

"Maybe he didn't mean to, but a milk bottle's pretty heavy. Anyhow I think he had already knocked the milkman out and taken his place before either Dr. Swayne or I went to the window."

"That's a lot of guessing," said the chief drily.

"I don't think so." She was still gently stubborn. "He didn't go in while we were there, or come out, either. He probably just drove the milk wagon up the street, took the bottles in case he was seen, and went in to wait in the service alley. If anyone saw him it was all right, wasn't it? Only the horse knew it was wrong."

"Blast the horse!" the chief exploded. "Are you telling me that after shooting Baird the man had the nerve to go back there? To talk to Swayne and leave the milk?"

"He never left," Anne Elizabeth said. "Maybe he didn't want to be seen leaving the scene of the crime immediately after the shot was fired. Or maybe he heard Dr. Swayne coming and panicked. Anyway, after planting the gun in Baird's hand in the faint hope of making it look like suicide, he faded back into the alley, figuring he'd make his getaway when the coast was clear."

Swayne stirred.

"How do you know all this?" he demanded. "Sounds to me as if you have a criminal mind."

"But it's all so simple," she told him. "When you went out into the yard he *had* to appear. Suppose you'd looked down the alley and seen him? What was he to do?"

"I notice he got away, just the same," Swayne said, almost sulkily.

"Why not? You did that, of course. You sent him on an errand. The horse helped, of course."

The chief groaned. "See here," he protested. "I'm allergic to horses. Any kind of horses. Now, how in God's name did this one help Richards to get away?"

"Oh, he had a good reason to leave by that time. Dr. Swayne gave it to him. It just happened the horse was there, at the house. You see, it knew it was headed the

wrong way. It thought about it for quite a while. Then it just turned around and came back, and stood in front of the alley, facing in the direction that it ordinarily did." And she added, "I don't suppose he expected it. And I imagine he'd have killed Dr. Swayne if his bluff hadn't worked. But it did work. I was gone from the window by that time, so all he had to do was to get into the wagon and drive away."

The chief drew a long breath. "Sure," he said dourly. "He got away, all right. Maybe he had a car somewhere. But he's got a long start on us. Even if he divided with Baird he's probably got enough money cached away to keep him somewhere for the rest of his life." He got up heavily. "Well, thanks, little lady," he said. "It isn't your fault we've lost him."

Anne Elizabeth got up too. She really looked very nice in her street clothes, and in high heels instead of the flat hospital ones. "I was just wondering," she said. "Did you find the horse and wagon?"

"We did. Is this more about horses?"

"Well, it's like this," said Anne Elizabeth. "You see, if Richards left the horse and wagon anywhere on his regular route they would eventually end-up in the stable. But if it was in a strange part of town they would probably just stay there."

A look of supreme surprise lightened the chief's heavy face. "So that's it!" he said. "Well, that horse

didn't go home, my girl. We found him near the railroad station, wagon and all. And that's the first honest-to-God clue we've had as to how Richards left town. If he took a train we've got a much better chance of tracing him."

He glanced at Winnie, stiff and speechless behind her desk, and gave her a beaming smile. "Bright young woman you've got here," he told her.

There was a brief silence after the chief had gone.

Swayne had not changed his position, but he smiled at the frozen figure behind the desk. "I understand you've taken Miss Ward off night duty temporarily," he said. "So if it's all right with you, Aunt Winnie, I'm taking her to the movies. A nice dark one."

Miss Winifred Ogden was obviously fighting a battle with herself, or rather a battle between her two selves, the one which remembered George in diapers, and the other, which had been encased in armor for lo, these many years, and regarded babies as creatures who only added diapers to the laundry costs. It was the early one which finally won.

"Very well, George," she said. "Perhaps I have been a trifle too strict. After all, times have changed."

If she winced a trifle when George put an unbrotherly arm around Anne Elizabeth nobody else noticed. Or cared.

Craig Rice

And the Birds Still Sing

A tale of the screwy, cockeyed, thoroughly unscrupulous John J. Malone, criminal lawyer-cum-criminologist . . . with Craig Rice's special mixture of humor and homicide, gags and gore.

THE HANDS OF THE CLOCK IN Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar had moved to where they looked like a cartoonist's idea of Oriental eyebrows. The customers had dwindled down to a janitor from the City Hall, a pair of slightly drunken reporters from the *Tribune*, an anonymous drunk who had just wandered in, and John J. Malone, Chicago's most famous (and at the moment, most disheveled and disconsolate) criminal lawyer.

It was with John J. Malone that Joe the Angel was having the argument. It was an old, familiar argument, and nobody was paying any attention.

"Always I am your friend," Joe the Angel said. "But is it my fault you spend your money on women, and you do not have enough to pay your bar bill?"

"It's only \$32," Malone said in righteous indignation.

"Malone," Joe said tearfully. "I am a poor man." He went on into details of his mother-in-law's recent operation, his cousin's traffic ticket, the mortgage payments on

his brother's undertaking parlor, and similar grim details until, carried away by his own eloquence, he automatically poured Malone a drink.

Malone downed it fast, before Joe could change his mind, and said gloomily, "Only \$32. And besides, the girl hocked the bracelet and spent the money on another guy."

"Serve you right," Joe the Angel said, polishing a glass. He stared at Malone and decided it would take more than a diamond bracelet. The little lawyer was a not-handsome ruin. His expensive Finchley suit looked as though Malone had been sleeping under the seats of a west-side street car. But, of course, Malone's suits always looked like that. His Sulka tie had somehow got under his ear. And there was a slight suggestion of a mouse under one eye, a left-over from the night before last's poker game.

"Some day," Malone said, "some woman will spend money on *me*."

"I doubt it," Joe the Angel said sorrowfully.

He was never so wrong in his

life. It was just about then that the blonde came in. Even the City Hall janitor lifted his head to look. Her hair was the color of dyed sunlight, her mascaraed eyes were the color of a bottomless lake in a cheap postcard, her mouth was like a recently washed strawberry. She wore enough mink to line a bathtub.

She flashed about \$1200 worth of white teeth at Joe the Angel and asked for John J. Malone.

For once Joe the Angel was speechless. He merely pointed.

She slid onto the bar stool next to Malone, smiled at him and said, "Hello, Mr. Malone. I'm Mona Trent. May I buy you a drink?"

Malone was about to say gallantly, "No, but may I buy you a drink?" when Joe beat him to the draw by setting out glasses and saying, "What will you have, Malone?"

The drink was down, and a second one ordered before she said, "Mr. Malone, I need your help. A friend of mine I'd rather not mention his name—recommended you, and said I might find you here."

"If it's a traffic ticket—" Malone began.

"It's something far more serious."

Malone took another look at her, and realized she was frightened, badly frightened.

"I can't talk to you here," she said very quietly, "and I've got to leave here alone." She gave him

that smile again. "Can you come up to my apartment at 10 tomorrow morning?" Without waiting for him to answer, she wrote down the address and handed it to him.

"Ten," Malone said, tucking the card in his pocket. "But—"

"Tomorrow," she said firmly. She beamed at Joe the Angel and said, "The check, please."

"That will be \$32," Joe said, without blinking.

A half-minute later she pulled two \$20 bills from her purse, tossed them on the counter, and said, "Keep the change." Then she turned to Malone and added, "Consider this a down payment on what I want you to do for me."

Before he could catch his breath, she was gone.

Five minutes later, Malone said, "Joe, I too am an honest man. There is \$8 change coming. All I want is half of it." He stuffed the \$4 in his vest pocket, paused halfway to the door, and said, "There's an all-night poker game going on at the Atlantis. If you'll lend me that other four—"

There were times, Joe the Angel reflected, after the little lawyer had gone, when he wondered why he even bothered about Malone.

It was a cold and very dreary morning when Malone arrived at the apartment on Chicago's near-north side. The poker game hadn't gone too well, there had been other complications, and it had all ended

him up with his owing Joe the Angel \$4 and having just enough left for two short taxi rides. And on top of everything else, it was raining—a cold, dismal February rain.

He consoled himself with the reminder that he had a client—and what a client! The little lawyer closed his eyes and thought about Mona Trent.

Furthermore, he'd managed to borrow \$32 from Maggie, his long-suffering secretary, and he had planned and rehearsed a magnificent gesture of returning it to Mona. She, of course, would offer him a handsome retainer for whatever she wanted him to do. Given just the right poker game, he could easily run that retainer into important money. Then there would be another magnificent gesture when he returned the retainer to her, along with a well-chosen present.

It was a wonderful dream.

In a moment of utter madness he tipped the cab-driver 50 cents, and regretted it immediately.

The sight of the building in which she lived raised his spirits a good inch and a half. It was in a block of houses once built by multimillionaires, later inhabited by mere millionaires, finally turned into apartments rented by semi-millionaires, and eventually taken over by just plain citizens who could afford that much rent.

The maid who opened the door

was just a shade less gorgeous than Mona herself. Malone began thinking about a suitable present for her, and reflected that her French accent was so flawless that she must be the product of a high-class dramatic school.

"Mees Trent ees een zhe leeving room. Zhall I eentrodooce you?"

"I'd rather surprise her," Malone said.

But it was Mona Trent who surprised him.

The French accent slipped off the lovely little maid like a hunk of butter sliding off a hot pancake. She said, "What the heck goes on here?"

Malone paused for just one minute in the doorway. It was daytime, but the lights were on and the shades were all drawn. He looked at Mona Trent and had the momentary sensation of just having swallowed an icecube, complete with all four corners.

She was sitting in a big chair near the window, and the coat for which an untold number of mink had loved and died was tossed carelessly on the nearby sofa. There was a neat little bullet hole in her forehead, and she was as dead as yesterday's newspapers.

"She's dead, isn't she!" the maid whispered just back of Malone's left ear. Almost automatically she pulled up the window shades.

"If she isn't," Malone said grimly, "the Coroner is going to be the most surprised man in the state of

Illinois. Now, where is the phone?"

"I'm a citizen and a taxpayer, and I know my rights," Malone said indignantly. "Look, von Flanagan, it isn't every day I get a client like this, and you let her get killed."

Captain von Flanagan of Homicide stared glumly at the mirror over Joe the Angel's bar and said nothing. It was an eloquently profane silence.

"The least you can do," Malone went on relentlessly, "is to find the murderer and recommend me as defense lawyer."

"Find the murderer," von Flanagan said. He sighed deeply.

The Medical Examiner's report had been that Mona Trent had been killed by a .22 caliber rifle bullet penetrating the brain. The time? Probably around 5 in the morning.

Malone scowled at his beer and said, "A fine, efficient police department! People in the neighborhood reported hearing shots at five in the morning. A couple of dumb lugs in a squad car make a routine investigation and that's all. When they could have probably picked up the murderer right in her apartment."

"She was shot through the window," von Flanagan reminded him.

"Just the same," Malone said insistently, "they might have noticed someone carrying a rifle."

The big police officer waved for more beer. "They made an arrest," he said.

Malone snorted with indignation. "Sure. They pick up Louis Perino. Just because he's a small-time racketeer. Then you smart cops find out he never heard of Mona Trent in his life, doesn't own a .22 caliber rifle and probably wouldn't know how to fire one, and you let him go."

Joe the Angel poured two beers and said, "This is on the house. Louis Perino, he works for a big-shot gambler named Eddie Carter. Mona Trent, she used to be Eddie's girl, and the boys say he didn't like it when she quit him for some rich society guy."

Malone and von Flanagan stared at Joe the Angel and then at each other. Von Flanagan lunged for the phone booth. Malone finished his beer and said, "Joe, sometimes I think you ought to be head of Homicide."

"Well," Maggie said acidly as Malone walked in his office, "I see you lost a client."

Malone muttered something about not rubbing it in.

There was still, he reflected, the \$32. But he had already decided to spend that on flowers for Mona's funeral. Joe the Angel's younger brother, who ran an undertaking parlor, could probably get them for him at a cut rate.

"Cheer up," Maggie said.

"You've got another client. A pair of them. Mr. and Mrs. Paul Cartwright. They're waiting in your private office."

Malone frowned at her. No client or prospective client was ever ushered into his private office without his presence and considerable impressive ceremony.

"They didn't look like the sort of people to be kept waiting in an anteroom," Maggie said.

"Good girl," Malone said approvingly. Maggie could smell money two miles off—three miles on a clear day.

He went in with his best professional smile and greeted them cordially. "So sorry to have kept you waiting!"

"Quite all right," Paul Cartwright said. "You had no way of knowing we were here."

The little lawyer sat down behind his time-battered desk and quietly looked them over. He guessed Mrs. Cartwright would be in her early forties. Once, she must have been almost a beauty, in a thin, well-bred sort of way. Her hair was brown. Just plain hair-color, Malone described it to himself. Her eyes were an undistinguished blue, her skin on the pale side. Her obviously expensive suit was exactly what the well-dressed woman will wear to a lawyer's office.

Her husband was a big man, gray-haired, deeply tanned. He looked as though he should have

been posing for an advertisement, with a whiskey glass in his hand and a hunting dog asleep at his feet.

"Mr. Malone," Paul Cartwright said, "what is the penalty for shooting birds in the city of Chicago?"

Malone blinked. "I don't think there is any," he said, "and if there is, it ought to be repealed at once." He detested birds.

A smile of relief crossed Mrs. Cartwright's face.

"There, Leonora," her husband said, "I told you there was nothing to worry about."

"But I did worry," she said. She turned to Malone. "I suffer terribly from insomnia. And for weeks the birds outside my window have been keeping me awake in the early morning. They start in chirping at the crack of dawn, and keep it up for hours. This morning, I was frantic and—I shot one of them."

"You deserve a bounty," Malone assured her.

The Cartwrights rose to go. Paul Cartwright murmured something polite about Malone's bill. Malone gestured magnificently and said, "If you'll leave your address with my secretary, I'll have her send you a bill."

The door had barely closed behind them when Maggie came in, her eyes blazing. "You could have collected it in cash!"

"These do not look like the type of people from whom one collects in cash," Malone said.

She sniffed. "Here's the latest edition of the newspapers. I paid for them with my own money. Just because I thought you'd be interested." She slammed the door when she went out.

Malone looked thoughtfully at the headlines. Eddie Carter and Louis Perino had been picked up for questioning in connection with the murder of ex-show girl Mona Trent. After a minute or two, Malone picked up the phone and called von Flanagan.

"Tell Eddie Carter not to talk to anybody until I get there. And be sure to tell him I'm his lawyer. Oh, yes, you will! Do you want me to tell your wife about that time in the roadhouse near Wheaton—?" He hung up the phone with a smile.

The anteroom outside von Flanagan's office was jam-packed with reporters and photographers. They leaped at Malone like a pack of undernourished wolves spying a rabbit.

Malone said coyly, "I have no statement to make beyond the fact that Eddie Carter is my client and that he is innocent." He paused, winked, and said, "And if you'd like to interview Eddie Carter in person, stick around until I open the door."

As he walked into von Flanagan's office, he heard the police officer saying "... it's no use, Carter. Perino has talked."

Malone slammed the door shut and said, "And just what did Perino say?"

"None of your business," von Flanagan said. On a quick double-take he added, "Oh, all right. He admitted Carter, here, was paying him to hang around this babe's apartment, and—"

"Don't call Mona no babe," Eddie Carter snarled.

Eddie Carter had been a jockey, a good or bad many years ago, and he still looked like one—except that no jockey had ever been able to afford the clothes, jewelry, and checkbook that Eddie Carter had on his person.

He turned to Malone and said, "Unnerstand you're defendin' me, Malone. Damn good thing, too. On account of—"

"Perino's confessed," von Flanagan said, in the weary voice of one who has repeated the same words a hundred times.

"You're a dirty liar," Eddie Carter said.

"Just a minute," Malone said. "I'm in charge here." He took a cigar from his pocket, slid off the cellophane wrapper, and said to von Flanagan, "I trust you understand that there are a few things sacred between a lawyer and his client."

Von Flanagan's broad face turned purple. He clenched his teeth as though he were holding back words that would not be sacred under any circumstances. Fi-

nally he said, "Okay, Malone, you want to talk to him about the size of his retainer. I have to go to the barber shop anyway." He left the office through his private door.

Eddie Carter said, "Honest t'Pete, Malone, I didn't have nothin' t'do w'it it, but that crazy Perino"—he reached for his checkbook and said, "How much?"

"Use your own judgment," Malone said, hoping for the best. "But here's what I want you to do—"

Five minutes later he opened the door to the anteroom and said softly, "Okay, boys."

Flash-bulbs and questions popped simultaneously at Eddie Carter, who sat with his face buried in his hands. At last he looked up, his face wet, mopped at his checks with a handkerchief which had just made a quick trip to von Flanagan's water cooler, and sobbed. "I'll get d'guy who killed her if it takes d'rest of my life."

He looked at the hankerchief, threw it on the floor, and said "Any a'you guys got sumpin I can blow my nose on?"

Malone whipped his own out fast and said, "Take it easy, Eddie."

Eddie Carter blew his nose noisily, stood up, and said "Okay, whatcha wanna know? I loved her. She was a wunnerful girl. Sure, I had Louis keep an eye on her. Why? Because I wanna know she's happy, see? That's all."

He sank down in the chair again

and buried his face in Malone's handkerchief. More flash-bulbs popped. Inspired, Eddie decided to add a line of his own. He looked up and said, "Even if I had of wanted to kill her, I wouldn't of done it."

The mob rushed out. Buddy paused long enough at the doorway to murmur to Malone, "If you ever get tired of being a lawyer, you ought to move to Hollywood. You'd be a great director!"

The door closed. Eddie Carter mopped his brow, handed Malone back his handkerchief, and said, "I hope I done all right. And here's your dough."

Malone said, "You did swell." He looked at the figure on the check, and leaned against von Flanagan's desk just in time to save himself from fainting.

And at that moment von Flanagan burst into the office, his red face beaming.

"Well, Mr. Carter, I guess you can go," he said happily, "and you won't need a lawyer. We've got a woman in here who has confessed to murdering Mona Trent. We've checked her story, and it's absolutely foolproof. I'm sorry we've put you to so much trouble. Mr. Perino is waiting for you in the lobby, and we've ordered a car to drive you home."

Malone finally caught his breath, and said hoarsely, "You realize, my client here can sue you for false arrest."

"Forget it," Eddie Carter said. "Y'just gimme d'check back." He all but snatched it from Malone's hands and was out of the office faster than a cat can climb a telephone pole.

It was a good two minutes before Malone was able to say, "At least, you might have waited to break the news until I'd had time to cash the check." He threw the remains of his cigar inaccurately at the cuspidor, broke out a new one, and said, "At least, you might tell me who she is." He lit the new cigar and added, "She probably needs a good defense lawyer."

"I'm giving you a break," von Flanagan said. "You're going to meet her right now."

The woman who was escorted through the door was Leonora Cartwright, very pale, and wearing exactly what the well-dressed woman will wear when confessing to murder.

Malone noticed with satisfaction that von Flanagan also rose as she came in the door. What was it Maggie had said? "*Not the sort of people to be kept waiting—*"

She acknowledged von Flanagan's introduction with a very wan and very forced smile and said, "I've already had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Malone."

Then suddenly her well-bred self-assurance fell away from her, like a wrap handed to the maid at the door, and she said, "Oh, Mr. Malone, I'm sorry, so terribly sorry,

that I lied to you today. You see, I knew that I had killed that—that Miss Trent."

Von Flanagan's politeness fell away even faster, and he roared at Malone, "You mean, this woman came to see you about this, and you didn't tell me?"

"She came to see me," Malone said, "about shooting a bird. So help me, until this minute, I had no idea she had anything to do with the case." He smiled at her reassuringly and said, "Go ahead, you can say anything you want to, because you're in the presence of your lawyer, and I'll deny every word of it in court anyway."

This time her smile was more wistful than wan. She said, "Part of it was true. About the birds, I mean."

Malone looked at von Flanagan and said, "Call in a stenographer. My client, Mrs. Paul Cartwright, is about to dictate a confession, which, on my advice, she will sign." He smiled at her while von Flanagan was busy on the intercom, and whispered in what his friends and enemies called his best cell-side manner, "Don't worry. I've never lost a client yet."

She looked at him the way a small child looks at a dream of Santa Claus.

She told the story just as she had told it to Malone a few hours before, but this time where were more details.

"I, Leonora Cartwright, make

this confession of my own free will and—"

"Never mind the prelude," Malone said, chewing savagely on his cigar. "The stenographer will fill that in. Just tell the story."

"I've been suffering terribly from insomnia," she said, in that lovely, limpid voice. "Especially just about daylight. That's the time of day when one *most* wants to sleep. And those birds—" She paused, smiled, and said softly, "Sometimes it seemed as though they were talking. I could fit words to the sounds they made—"

"Look here, Malone," von Flanagan roared, "if you're trying to build up an insanity defense—"

"Shut up," Malone said calmly. "Let her tell her story. I haven't heard all of it yet, and I'd like to." He smashed out his cigar, reached for another one, and said gently, "Go on, Mrs. Cartwright."

"Last night was—particularly bad. There was a frightfully noisy party going on next door. Finally, I took a sleeping pill. I fell asleep, but the birds woke me, at dawn. I was—a little groggy, I think. You know how it is when you've taken a sleeping pill, and something wakes you. I was, honestly, frantic. I got up and woke Paul, and told him I was going to shoot those birds. He was pretty sleepy too—but he handed me the rifle and said, 'Go ahead and shoot.'"

She paused, and caught her breath. "I should have known bet-

ter. And I'm a notoriously poor shot. I fired. Twice. And then I was frightened. Paul put the rifle away and helped me back to bed."

Again she smiled, that wistful, almost childlike smile. "I slept, then," she said.

After an almost unbearably long silence, the stenographer said, in a brisk, professional voice, "Yes, Mrs. Cartwright?"

"This morning," Leonora Cartwright almost whispered, "I learned about—that—about Miss Trent. And I knew I'd killed her. That's all." She smiled at the stenographer and said, "I'll sign that when it's ready. And thank you."

Von Flanagan said, "Yes, but how about your going to Malone's office to establish the fact that you *had* been shooting at birds?"

"Paul thought it was wise. I realized later that it wasn't. That's why I came down here."

Malone finished lighting his cigar and said, "See? The best you can do with this is accidental death."

"The best I can do with this," von Flanagan said coldly, "is first-degree murder." He turned to Leonora Cartwright and said, "There are a few facts you left out of that so-called confession. One, Mona Trent was your husband's—shall we say—friend? Two, he insisted on that particular apartment you lived in, because it was next door to Mona Trent's—so he could not only visit her more conveniently

but also watch her apartment through the windows, and make sure that she was—well, let's say—behaving herself."

Leonora Cartwright moaned, very softly.

Von Flanagan went on relentlessly, "Three, you bitterly resented the taking of that apartment, because you were insanely jealous of Mona Trent. And finally," he gave Malone a triumphant look, "you discovered that at one time your husband had been married to Mona Trent; and there was considerable doubt as to whether their divorce had been legal. She wasn't blackmailing him—she was too smart for that. But she knew you wouldn't like it if she tried to pin a bigamy rap on him. It wouldn't look good in the newspapers."

"Don't pay any attention to him," Malone said. "He's just bluffing." He wished he could put more conviction into his voice.

"Am I?" von Flanagan snarled. "You said the police department was inefficient. Well, we get around and ask questions too. Motive, and opportunity. Her fingerprints on the gun. Her phony story about the birds . . . We're holding her for murder, Malone."

There was another long silence. Then Leonora Cartwright said, "Mr. Malone—this is a rather new experience to me. But there must be certain formalities—I mean—about your retainer—" She had been fumbling in her purse, and

finally brought out a checkbook and a fountain pen.

"Forget it," Malone said magnificently. "I'll discuss it with your husband."

"No," she said, in that strangely musical voice. "Because you see, it's all my money. Paul doesn't have any." She finished writing a check, handed it to Malone. "Will this be enough, for now?"

"Of course," Malone said, not looking at the check. He folded it and slipped it in his vest pocket. He said to himself—*not the sort of people to keep waiting in an ante-room, or to discuss money with.* "And now, von Flanagan, may I have a word with my client?"

Von Flanagan growled, "Five minutes."

"I'll need only two," Malone said smoothly, as von Flanagan left the room. He waited a moment, and said, "Mrs. Cartwright, in a minute or so, you're going to have to walk through that door, with a police matron on one side and your lawyer on the other. There will be a bunch of newspaper reporters and photographers waiting for that moment. Think of something to say. And for the love of Mike, don't collapse—it looks like the devil in a picture. What I'm trying to say is, make with the dignity."

She smiled at him and said, "I think you can trust me, Mr. Malone."

Looking at her, and thinking of the photographers, Malone began

to wish he was wearing the necktie a famous actor had sent him from Hollywood last Christmas.

Luckily, the police matron turned out to be tall and stocky, with a broad, fat face, making Leonora Cartwright seem all the more delicate. She faced the barrage of questions and cameras with that very sad, very sweet little smile, chin up, and standing very straight.

"Yes," she said, "I did kill Mona Trent. But it was an accident." She waited for another set of flashbulbs to pop, and added, "I'm very fortunate in having Mr. John J. Malone to defend me."

For the first time, Malone hoped the case would go before a jury. He could use the publicity. And he could wear that hand-painted necktie.

Malone tossed the thousand-dollar check on Maggie's desk and said, "Deposit this fast. Draw some checks. Pay the office rent, your back salary, the liquor store on Clark Street, my hotel bill, save a hundred for me, and get Rico di Angelo on the phone, fast."

Maggie looked at the check, picked up the phone, dialed, and began singing, "I wish I had died in my cradle—before I grew up to meet you." Pause. "Mr. Rico di Angelo, please. Mr. Malone calling." She put her hand over the mouthpiece and said, "Eddie Carter's in the office. I know I should have made him wait out here, but

he seemed to be in such a state—Thank you. Just a minute, please."

Malone whispered, "What does Carter want?"

"He either wants to kiss you or kill you," Maggie said, "but you'll soon know. Here is Mr. Malone. Thank you for waiting."

"Rico," Malone said, "How many flowers for a fine funeral can I get for 32 bucks—"

Eddie Carter looked about as unhappy as a man can get, and still live. He lifted his face from his hands as Malone walked in. The face, Malone decided, was in interesting combination of drawn and haggard. The word for it might be draggard. Or, maybe, hawn.

"Look here, Malone," the gambler said, "I ain't a guy which apologizes easy, but I gotta apologize to you, see. So here I am."

"Apologize to me?" Malone said easily. "For what? Have you insulted me when I wasn't looking?" Draggard was the word, he decided. "Eddie, I think you can use a drink." He pulled open the filing cabinet drawer marked *EMERGENCY* and pulled out an almost-full pint of gin. He found an almost-clean glass, filled it halfway to the top, and handed it over.

"T'anks," Eddie Carter said. The gin went down fast. "And what's more, Malone, I ain't a guy what says t'anks easy, either." He lit a cigarette on the second try, and said, "Okay, I've apologized, and

here's the check back. I shouldn't a'acted that way but I guess I was upset, kind of."

Malone said, "Forget it, Eddie." He tore the check into sixteen pieces and dropped it into the wastebasket. "Now we're even." He poured another five inches of gin into Eddie Carter's glass and said, "Tell me about Mona Trent."

"She's dead," the gambler said tonelessly. He downed his drink and said, "When a person's dead, a person's dead, and there's nothing another person can do but send flowers, see?"

Malone nodded, and wondered if Eddie Carter's floral offering would outdo the blanket of orchids he had managed for \$32.

"What I mean is," Eddie Carter said, "I wasn't sore at Mona, see? She figgered she could do better, that's okay by me. Only, uninnerstan', I wanna make sure this society bum is treatin' her right, and that's how come I had Louie keep'n eye on her. I guess he must of been, or Louie would of told me."

Malone found another glass and expertly divided the remaining gin. The two men were silent for a moment. It was, after all, a very private and personal wake.

"But jealous!" Eddie said suddenly. "Jeez. Everybody was jealous. This society bum, he's so jealous of Mona, he lives right across the alley from her so's he can watch t'rough d'windows and make sure she don't have no boy

frien's. N' d'society bum's wife, she's so jealous of d'bum, he don't dare take no chance on visitin' Mona till d'wife goes to sleep." He grinned at Malone. "Louie, he gets around."

The unhappy mood dropped from him abruptly. "Say, Malone, d'pictures come out swell." He began unfolding the collection he had under his arm.

The pictures had, indeed, come out swell. Eddie Carter, bereaved lover, was the very image of tragedy. The interviews had turned out even better. An inspired Buddy McHugh had translated Eddie's last line into "Even if I'd wanted to kill her, something would have stopped me at the last minute. Because I always loved her."

Eddie Carter rose, tucked the newspapers under his arm, and said, "I a'ready ordered twenty copies a' everything. Malone, I'm sorry you wouldn't take d'check."

Malone was sorry too. He made a fast mental resolution about momentary impulses and generous gestures.

At the door, Eddie Carter paused and said, "Say, come up to d'joint some night, Malone."

Malone sat brooding for a long time after Eddie had gone. He was still brooding when Maggie came in with the last editions.

"A nice day's work," she commented. "All in twenty-four hours you get three clients. One's dead, one's free, and one's in jail. Here's

your hundred bucks, and I must say, Mrs. Cartwright looks very nice."

The papers had done even better by Leonora Cartwright than they had by Eddie Carter. The sad, sweet smile had come through beautifully. And the *News*, the *Times* and the *Herald-American* had used her line, "I'm very fortunate in having John J. Malone for a lawyer."

"One more like that," Malone said, "and the world will be bringing mousetraps to our door." He scowled. "There's something wrong, Maggie. It must have happened that way, but—" He paused, reached for a cigar, and said, "Blast it, there's just one thing that's important, and I've forgotten what it is."

"Maybe," Maggie snapped, "it's to get a shave and change your shirt." Her eyes softened. "Or get a good night's sleep."

Malone ignored her. He rose, stuffed the ten \$10 bills in his pocket, and headed for the door.

"Maggie, where can I find an Almanac?"

"Try the public library," Maggie said.

"Thanks," Malone said. "You can close up the office and go home. I'm going to the library, and then to see Paul Cartwright."

The Cartwright apartment was an interior decorator's dream of Paradise. It had been so obviously

designed around Paul Cartwright's personality that Malone expected a maddened leopard to come charging through the underbrush at any moment.

"Nice, isn't it," Paul Cartwright said. "That's an elephant gun on the wall, just to your left. Scotch?"

Malone winced, glanced over his left shoulder, and said, "Yes, thanks." He wondered how the scotch was going to co-ordinate with the bourbon, beer, and gin he'd been using for the past twenty-four hours. He looked across the room and what he assumed was the head of a sabre-toothed tiger leered at him.

"Got that one in India," Paul Cartwright said. "Water or soda? Right. Village natives asked me to get him. Killer, he was."

Malone deliberately avoided looking around the room. He expected any minute to see the carefully mounted head of a Tibetan Lama.

"Don't misunderstand me," Paul Cartwright said. "I am not a hunter by trade. I shot that tiger because it had killed twenty-two natives in less than a month. I do not condone the killing of any living thing for sport. Only from necessity. Our trips—Mrs. Cartwright always came with me—were not big-game hunting expeditions; they were scientific explorations, made possible through the generosity of Leonora's father. Naturally, one does not take chances."

"Just as your wife—" Malone began. He stopped suddenly.

Paul Cartwright hid his face in his hands for a moment, then he looked up and met Malone's eyes. "*It was* an accident. You *will* be able to—get her off?"

Malone said, for the third time, "I've never lost a client yet."

The answering smile was forced, and a little grim. "I'll never forgive myself. Another scotch? Good. Mr. Malone, I'm going to tell you the truth. I was mad about Mona. You can understand something like that."

"You're damned right I can," Malone said fervently, thinking of the blanket of orchids. He tinkled the ice in his glass. It made a lovely sound. He wondered why some great composer didn't write it into a symphony. "How long were you married to her?"

"Oh. Oh, of course, you know that, too. It was less than a month. We were both poor. I had a chance to go along on an expedition to Upper Mongolia. She had a chance to go into the chorus of a Broadway show. We parted friends." He grimaced. "I don't need to tell you how lovely she was then—and always."

"You don't," Malone said.

"It isn't true that she ever tried to blackmail me. It turned out that the Mexican divorce she got wasn't valid. But that wasn't what mattered. The minute I saw her again—"

Paul Cartwright paused, gulped down his scotch, and said, "It's true, I insisted on our taking this apartment because it was near hers. It's true that I was insanely jealous, that I watched her through the windows to make sure there wasn't another man in her life. And somehow, Leonora—well, Leonora is a jealous person too. But she wouldn't have—it was an accident. Leonora is a very bad shot."

Malone rose, strolled over to the windows. The two apartments were separated by the average-sized alley. Through the window, he could see the chair where Mona Trent had been found dead.

"Accidents happen in the best of murders," he told Paul Cartwright consolingly. "And thanks for the scotch."

He wasn't quite sure why he wanted to see Mona Trent's apartment again. It was that something—the something he couldn't quite remember. He hoped that the imitation French maid would be there to let him in. She was.

This time, she didn't even bother with the accent.

"Hello, Mr. Malone. They told me I could come in and clean up the place. I still have three days' pay coming, so I thought I'd earn it."

"Give me a towel and I'll help wipe the dishes," Malone said. "Where did you get that phony French accent, and is your name really Yvette?"

"The dishes are wiped," she told him. "I got the French accent at a dramatic school in Hollywood, my name is really Gertrude Hutchins, I want to be an actress, and do you drink anything?"

"Yes," Malone said, "anything."

While she went into the kitchen, Malone prowled around the room. There was something wrong, and he didn't know just what it was.

The drinks were wonderful. Cool and frosted, and long.

"You're going to go far in this world," Malone said. "Now tell me the story of your life."

Five minutes later she said, coyly, "Hadn't we better pull down the window shades?"

Malone murmured, "Um-hm."

Shades! That was it! He looked at them, sprang to his feet. "Yvette. Bertie. Trudy. Whatever your names. What time did you leave here last night?"

She stared at him. "Just after Miss Trent came home."

"Were the shades drawn?"

"No. Mr. Cartwright—I guess you know all that. She said she was going to sit at the open window and watch for the signal he always makes when he's on his way over. Mr. Malone, what was the name of that Hollywood producer you mentioned?"

"Never mind," Malone said, "I'll get in touch with him."

"I know what I'm doing," Malone said hoarsely into the tele-

phone. "Just pick him up on suspicion of murder. Confront him with all the details I've given you. You'll get a confession. No, I'm not out of my mind! Okay, I'll meet you later in Joe the Angel's."

"It was the window shades," Malone said to von Flanagan, hours later.

Von Flanagan sighed, and said, "Okay, Cartwright confessed. But what's all this about window shades?"

"According to Cartwright's story," Malone said, "he waited until Mrs. Cartwright was in a drugged sleep. Then he went to visit Mona. Naturally, they pulled down the shades. Some time later, he went home. Mrs. Cartwright was suffering from the kind of insomnia that follows a heavy dose of sleeping pills. She shot at a bird, and killed a pigeon."

The little lawyer went on, wearily, "Except, there should have been a bullet hole in the window shade. There was a neat little hole in the window glass, but none in the shade."

"Now, Cartwright's confession," von Flanagan muttered. He waved at Joe the Angel for another beer. "He says he waited until there was a noisy party next door, and took advantage of it to shoot Mona Trent. The noise would cover the sound of the shot. After he'd killed her, he went next door and pulled down the shades, so that curious

neighbors wouldn't look in the window and see the dead body. At dawn, he encouraged his wife to shoot at birds."

"It's a nice confession," Malone said. "Now go back to your office and dictate it, and get Paul Cartwright to sign it. As his lawyer, I'll repudiate it in court and swear it was signed under duress."

Von Flanagan muttered something unpleasant, and left. The little lawyer sat at the bar, humming, "I wish I had died in my cradle."

After a while he walked out into the rain and hailed a cab.

"It was very kind of you to bring me home," Leonora Cartwright said. "But I just don't think I can stay here overnight. If you'll wait until I pack a few things—"

"I'll wait," Malone said, "until you pack whatever you'll need in jail. You've got to confess sooner or later, you know. And you can't let your husband sit in a damp little cell overnight, when it was really you who killed Mona Trent—and not by accident."

His skin felt as cold as the skin of a recently caught fish. He was bluffing, and he didn't think he was going to get away with it.

She flew at him in a fury.

"It was pure jealousy," Malone said, between her outbursts. He wondered where nice women learned such words. "The word 'jealousy' is the theme song of this act, and I should have caught on

to it much earlier. Paul married you because your father was a multimillionaire, and would finance his expeditions. You knew that, but you didn't know that he was genuinely fond of you, and would have protected you with his life—as he's doing now."

He paused long enough to light a cigar and said, "Shut up, dear, I'm talking. You hated Mona Trent, perhaps with good reason, and you decided to kill her. Now don't tell me a woman who has traveled round the world with Paul Cartwright on hunting expeditions doesn't know how to handle a .22 caliber rifle. And there's nothing wrong with your eyesight, and frankly, I don't believe you take sleeping pills. You shot Mona Trent, and your husband knew it, and being the kind of guy he is, he tried to cover up for you."

He looked at her. The smile was there, the faint, sad, wistful little smile. "How did you know?"

Malone paused, relit his cigar, and said, "Something kept bothering me. Presumably this 'accident' took place at dawn, or shortly thereafter, according to your statement. But when Mona Trent was found dead, the lights were on, full blast, in her apartment. People don't usually leave the lights on with a sunrise coming through the window, unless they happen to be dead."

Malone tossed away his match and reflected, that was a nice line.

"But really," Malone said, "the birds told me. Not because they sang, but because they *didn't* sing."

"Go on," Leonora Cartwright whispered.

"You see," he went on, wishing with all his heart it weren't true, "you overlooked something. You said that the birds sang at dawn. But Mona Trent was killed at 5 in the morning, and according to the Almanac, the sun rose at exactly 7:12 A.M. No self-respecting bird would be yelping when it was still as dark as the floor of a coal cellar." He added, "If it did, it deserved to be shot at."

"That *was* stupid of me, wasn't it?" Leonora Cartwright said.

She rose, slipped on her coat with a graceful gesture that all but broke Malone's heart, and said, "You're quite right. I shot her through the open window, while Paul was on his way to her apartment. He knew. He pulled down the window shades. He made up a story for me. He—" She sighed, softly. "Shall we go now?"

At the door, she paused for one moment. "You *will* defend me in court, Mr. Malone?"

"You're damned right I will!" said Malone fervently.

A bad-tempered dawn was crawling up from the other side of Lake Michigan. In the nearby trees, birds were beginning to sing.



Arthur Miller

It Takes a Thief

A crime story, in a surprisingly light vein, by the brilliant author of the great American play, "Death of a Salesman" . . . No citizen of this country; or of any country in the world, needs to worry about the problem posed by this story—providing, of course, that he or she is a good citizen.

SOME PEOPLE ARE LAUGHING IN our neighborhood these nights, but most of us are just waiting, like the Sheltons. It is simply unbelievable, it came out so right.

Here is this man, Mr. Shelton, a middle-aged man with what they call a nice family and a nice home. Ordinary kind of businessman, tired every night, sits around on Sundays, pinochle and so on. The point is, he's been doing all right the past few years. Automobiles. His used cars were shipped to California, Florida—wherever the war plants were springing up. Did fine. Then the war ended. The new cars started coming through and then the strikes made them scarce. But people wanted them very badly. Very, very badly. He did fine. Very, very fine.

One night not long ago he and his wife decided to take in a night club, and she put on her two diamond rings, the bracelet, and some of her other frozen cash, and they locked up the house—the children are all married and don't live home

any more—and they were off for a trip to the city.

Nobody knows what they did in the city, but they stayed out till 3 in the morning. Late enough for Shelton to get a headful. The drive home was slow and careful because the car was one of his brand-new ones and he couldn't see too well in his condition. Nevertheless, when he put the key in the front-door lock he was able to notice that the door swung open at a touch, whereas it usually took some jiggling of the latch. They went in and turned on the living-room lights, and then they saw it.

The drawer of the desk was lying on the floor, and the rug was littered with check stubs and stationery. The Sheltons rushed into the dining room and saw at once that the sterling-silver service was gone from the massive serving table. Shelton clutched at his heart as though he were going to suffocate, and Mrs. Shelton thrust her fingers into her hair and screamed. At this stage, of course, there was only the

sensation that an alien presence had passed through their home. Perhaps they even imagined that the thief was still there. In wild fright they ran to the stairs and up to their bedroom, and Shelton tripped and fell over a bureau drawer that the thief had left on the threshold. Mrs. Shelton helped him up and made him lie down on the colonial bed and she massaged his heart while they both looked anxiously toward the closet door, which stood open.

When he had caught his breath, he pushed her aside and went into the closet and turned on the light. She crowded in beside him as soon as she saw the terrible expression on his face. The safe. The little steel safe that had always stood in the corner of the closet covered with dress boxes and old clothes, the safe was looking up at them from the corner with its door open. Shelton simply stood there panting. It was Mrs. Shelton who got to her knees and felt inside.

Nothing. Nothing was left. The safe was empty. Mrs. Shelton, on her knees in the closet, screamed again. Perhaps they felt once more the presence, the terrifying presence of the thief, for they rushed one behind the other down the stairs, and Shelton picked up the telephone.

The instrument shook in his hand as he bent over close to the dial and spun it around. Mrs. Shelton moved up and down beside him, clasping and unclasping her

hands and weeping. "Oh, my God!"

"Police!" Shelton roared into the telephone as soon as he heard the operator's calm voice. "My house has been robbed. We just got home and—"

His voice caught Mrs. Shelton just as she was about to dig her fingers into her hair again. For an instant she stood perfectly still, then she turned suddenly and swung her arm out and clapped her hand over Shelton's mouth. Infuriated, he attempted to knock her hand away. Then his eyes met hers. They stood that way, looking into each other's eyes; and then Shelton's hand began to shake violently and he dropped the telephone with a loud bang onto the marble tabletop and collapsed into a high-backed, Italian-type chair. Mrs. Shelton replaced the telephone on its cradle as the operator's anxious voice flowed out of it.

They were both too frightened to speak for a few minutes. The same thing was rushing through their heads and there was no need to say what it was. Only a solution was needed, and neither of them could find it. At last Mrs. Shelton said, "You didn't give the operator the name or address. Maybe—"

"We'll see," he said, and went into the living room and stretched out on the couch.

Mrs. Shelton went to the front windows and drew the shades. Then she came back to the couch

and proceeded to walk up and down beside it, her breasts rising and falling with the heavy rhythm of her breathing.

Nothing happened for nearly an hour. They even made a pass at undressing, just as though he had not shouted frantically into the telephone that his house had been robbed. But they were hardly out of their clothes when the doorbell rang. In dressing gown and slippers Shelton went down the stairs with his wife behind him. In the presence of strangers he always knew how to look calm, so much so that when he opened the door and let the two policemen in, he appeared almost sleepy.

The question of his having hung up without giving his name was cleared away first: He had been too excited to give that detail to the operator. The officers then went about inspecting the premises. That completed, Shelton and his wife sat in the living room with them and gave a detailed description of the seven pieces of jewelry that had been taken from the safe, and the silver service, and the old Persian lamb coat, and the other items, all of which were noted in a black-covered pad that one policeman wrote in. When Shelton had closed the door behind the two officers, he stood thinking for a while, and his wife waited for his word. Finally he said, "We'll report the jewelry to the insurance company tomorrow."

"What about the money?"

"How can I mention the money?"

She knew there was no answer to that one, but it was hard, nevertheless, to give up \$91,000 without a complaint.

In bed they lay without moving. Thinking. "What'll we do," she asked, "if they find the crook and he's still got the money?"

A long time later, Shelton said, "They never catch thieves."

Eight days passed, in fact, before Shelton's opinion was proved wrong. The telephone rang at dinnertime. He covered the mouthpiece with his palm and turned to his wife. "They want me to come down and identify the stuff." There was a quavering note in his voice.

"What about the money?" she whispered.

"They didn't mention the money," he said, questioning her with his eyes.

"Maybe tell them you're too sick to go now."

"I'll have to go sometime."

"Try to find out first if they found the money."

"I can't *ask* them, can I?" he said angrily, and turned again to the telephone and said he would be right over.

He drove slowly. The new, purring engine, the \$1900 car for which he could easily get \$4,000 cash carried him effortlessly toward the police station. He drove slumped in the seat. As though to rehearse, he

kept repeating the same sentence in his mind: I am simply a dealer, I am simply a dealer; I kept that much cash on hand to buy cars with. It sounded all right, businesslike. But was it possible they were that dumb? Maybe. They were just plain cops. Plain cops might not realize that \$91,000 was too much to have in a safe for that purpose. And still, it was possible they would not stumble on the truth at all, not know that cash in a home safe was probably not entered on any ledger or income-tax form. Cops did not know much about big money, he felt. And yet—\$91,000. Oh! \$91,000! His insides grew cool at the thought of it. Not 20,000, or 40,000, not even 75,000, but \$91,000. His retirement, his whole future ease, his very sureness of gait lay entirely in that money. It had become a tingling sensation for him, a smell, a feeling, a taste—\$91,000 cash money in his safe at home. He had even stopped bothering to read the papers in the past year. Nothing that happened in the world could touch him while he had \$91,000 in his closet.

There were three policemen sitting in the room when he entered. He identified himself, and they asked him to sit down. One of them went out. The remaining two were in shirtsleeves and seemed to be merely waiting around. In a little while a gray-haired man entered, followed by a detective who carried a cheap canvas zipper bag which he

set on a desk near the door. The detective introduced himself to Shelton, and asked him to repeat his description of the jewelry. Shelton did so in some detail, answering more specific questions as they occurred to the detective.

The gray-haired man had slumped into a chair. Now he sat staring at the floor. Shelton slowly realized, as he described the jewelry, that this was the thief; for the man seemed resigned, very tired, and completely at home in the situation.

The detective went at last to the desk and opened the zipper bag and laid out the jewelry for Shelton to inspect. Shelton glanced at it and said it was his, picking up a wedding ring which had his name and his wife's engraved on the inside.

"We'll have the coat for you by tomorrow and maybe the silver, too," the detective said, idly arranging the jewelry in a pattern on the desk as he spoke. Shelton felt that the detective was getting at something from the way he played with the jewelry. The detective completed the pattern on the desk and then turned his broad, dark face toward Shelton and said, "Is there anything else you lost?"

Shelton's hand, of its own accord, moved toward his heart as he said, "That's all I can remember."

The detective turned his whole body now and sat easily on the edge of the desk. "You didn't lose any money?"

The gray-haired thief raised his head, a mystified look clouding his face.

"Money?" asked Shelton. And yet he could not help adding, "What money?" Just curiously.

"We found this on him," the detective said, reaching into the bag and taking out five rolled-up wads of money wrapped in red rubber bands. Shelton's heart hurt him when he saw the rubber bands, because they, more than any of the other items, were peculiarly his. They were the rubber bands he always used in his office.

"There's \$91,000 here," the detective said.

The thief was looking up at Shelton from his chair, an expression of wounded bewilderment drawing his brows together. The detective merely sat on the desk, an observer; the moment suddenly belonged only to Shelton and the thief.

Shelton stared at the money without any expression on his face. It was too late to think fast; he had no idea what sort of mind this stolid detective had and he dared not hesitate long enough to sound the man out. A detective, Shelton knew, is higher than a cop; is more like a businessman, knows more. This one looks smart, and yet maybe...

Shelton broke into a smile and touched one of the wads of bills that lay on the desk. (Oh, the \$91,000; oh, the touch of it!) Sweat was running down his back; his heart

pained like a wound. He smiled and stalled for time. "That's a lot of money," he said softly, frantically studying the detective's eyes for a sign.

But the detective was impassive, and said, "Is it yours?"

"Mine?" Shelton said, with a weak laugh. Longingly he looked at the solid wads. "I wish it were, but it isn't. I don't keep 91 thou—"

The thief, a tall man, stood up quickly and pointed to the money. "What the hell is *this*?" he shouted, amazed.

The detective moved toward him, and he sat down again. "It's his. I took it out of the safe with the other stuff."

"Take it easy," the detective said.

"Where did I get it, then?" the thief demanded in a more frightened tone. "What're you trying to do, pin another job on me? I only pulled one, that's all! You asked me and I told you." And, pointing directly up at Shelton's face, he said "He's pullin' something!"

The detective, as he turned to Shelton, was an agonizingly expressionless man who seemed to have neither pulse nor point of view. He simply stood there, the law with two little black eyes. "You're sure," he said, "that this is not your money?"

"I ought to know," Shelton said, laughing calmly.

The detective seemed to catch the absurdity of it, and very nearly smiled. Then he turned to the thief

and, with a nod of his head, motioned him outside. The two policemen walked out behind him.

They were alone. The detective, without a word, returned to the desk and put the jewelry back into the zipper bag. Without turning his head, he said that they would return the stuff to Shelton in the morning. And then he picked up one of the heavy wads, but instead of dropping it into the bag he hefted it thoughtfully in his palm and turned his head to Shelton. "Lot of dough," he said.

"I'll say," Shelton agreed.

The detective continued placing the wads in the bag. Shelton stood a little behind him and to one side, watching as best he could for the slightest change in the man's expression. But there was none; the detective might have been asleep but for his open eyes. Shelton wanted to leave—immediately. It was impossible to know what was happening in the detective's head.

And yet Shelton dared not indicate his desperation. He smiled again, and shifted his weight easily to one foot and started to button his coat, and said—as if the question were quite academic—"What do you fellas do with money like that?"

The detective zipped the bag shut. "Money like what?" he asked evenly.

A twinge of pain shot through Shelton's chest at the suspicious reserve in the detective's question. "I

mean, money that's not claimed," he amended.

The detective walked past him toward the door. "We wait," he said, and opened the door.

"I mean, supposing it's never claimed?" Shelton asked, following him, still smiling as though with idle curiosity.

"Hot money is never claimed," the detective said. "We'll just wait. Then we'll start looking around."

"I see."

Shelton walked with the detective to the door of the precinct station, and he even talked amiably, and then they said a pleasant good night.

Staring at the pavement rolling under the wheels of his car, he could summon neither feeling nor thought. It was only when he opened the door of his house, the house that had once contained the fortune of his life, that his numbness flowed away, and he felt weak and ill.

"There must be a way to get it back," she began.

"How?"

"You mean to tell me—?"

"I mean to tell you!" he shouted, and got to his feet. "What'll I do, break into the station house?"

"But they've got laws against robbery!"

In reply, Shelton pulled his collar open and climbed the stairs and went to bed.

These days, Shelton rides to busi-

ness very slowly. The few friends he has on the block have grown accustomed to the gray and haunted stare in his eyes. The children seem to quiet down as he guides his car through their street games.

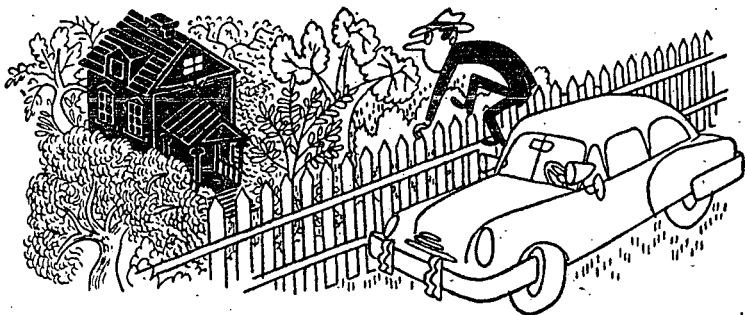
Sometimes he goes by the police station, and passing it he slows down and peers through the car window at it, but always goes on.

And when a police car rolls into the block on its ordinary tour, people can be seen stopping to watch until it passes his house. Nobody

has said anything, of course, but we are waiting with Shelton for that awful moment when the police car pulls up at his door. And it must, of course.

Thirty days, maybe two months from now, it will turn the corner and slow down, and gradually, ominously, come to a stop.

The house is very quiet these nights—almost silent. The shades are drawn, and it is seldom that you see anyone going in or out. The Sheltons are waiting.



David Frome (Leslie Ford)

The Man on the Iron Palings

The only short story about Mr. Pinkerton, the sentimental Welshman who still wears an old-fashioned celluloid collar, string tie, and brown bowler and who is the "gadfly on the stolid flank of Inspector J. Humphrey Bull of the C.I.D."

MR. EVAN PINKERTON STOPPED abruptly, clutched his steel-rimmed spectacles, and stared, blinking, ahead of him. For one dreadful moment the policeman's cape on the curving iron paling just beside the entrance to St. Stephen's Close looked like a man's body hanging there.

"Oh, dear!" Mr. Pinkerton thought.

He glanced anxiously behind him to see if anyone had seen him thinking it, and breathed thankfully. The road was quite empty. Nevertheless he scurried along a little faster. The Assistant Commissioner of New Scotland Yard had said, not a month before, that the next time Mr. Pinkerton found a dead body, anywhere, under any circumstances, he was going to hang him, just to make sure.

He had said it as a joke, of course. He had even winked at the Home Secretary's secretary, standing at the window. But the gray, rabbity, little Welshman's tongue had gone quite dry and his heart quite icy. The Home Secretary's secretary's

"Ha, ha! Where there's so much smoke—eh, Sir Charles? Ha, ha!" had sounded peculiarly mirthless.

And then Mr. Pinkerton, hurrying along toward the gate, stopped dead in his tracks again and stood staring stupidly. The thing hanging there! It was *not* a policeman's cape playing optical tricks in the dusk. It was a man. He was not hanging there exactly; he was caught and held, his arms out, pinned between the iron palings. And he was dead. Mr. Pinkerton knew that even before he saw the wet moving thing oozing from the spot under his shoulder and gathering in a slow, darkening pool on the pavement.

Mr. Pinkerton, his face a little white, looked up and down the road. There was no one in sight. The Home Secretary's secretary's "Ha, ha!" sounded suddenly in his ears, and his heart stopped beating for an instant. That is why he did probably the most foolish thing he had ever done in a life fairly compact of foolish, frightened things; he scurried, as fast as he could with-

out definitely bolting for it, past the dreadful inert object and along to the gate of St. Stephen's Close.

The porter just coming from the opposite side of the court looked at him oddly.

Mr. Pinkerton moistened his dry lips. "The meeting of the Society about fishing?" he stammered. He fumbled nervously in his pocket for the card that Sir Timothy Pounceby-Smith had given him, and held it out. The porter looked at it.

"Straight along through, sir," he said. "You're a bit late. They'll be showin' the pictures by now."

Mr. Pinkerton glanced at his large silver watch, but his hand shook so that he could barely make out the time. It was late; he knew that. And ordinarily nothing would have induced him to go barging in, interrupting Mr. King Usher's lecture on "Dangerous Fishing Under Tropical Skies." But the thing out on the paling behind him was not ordinary.

"I'll slip in quietly," he said. "I—I'm very much interested in tropical fish."

He scurried across the narrow paved court to the door the porter had indicated.

"I shouldn't have said that," he thought wretchedly. It was wrong to lie, of course. But that was not the point. In such cases as this gave every sign of becoming, it was a serious tactical blunder. No one knew that better than Mr. Pinkerton, for many years friend and gad-

fly on the stolid flank of his former lodger, Inspector J. Humphrey Bull, of the C.I.D. He had seen many people caught up by the heels for less flagrant untruths than that.

For actually Mr. Pinkerton had no interest in fish whatsoever, and he had never fished, or had the faintest idea of fishing, in all his life. He was only coming to hear Mr. King Usher's lecture because Sir Timothy Pounceby-Smith had invited him and given him his card. It was small enough reward for returning the dispatch-case of bearer bonds that Sir Timothy had left on the bench in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

But that, of course, never occurred to Mr. Pinkerton, whom nobody ever invited anywhere in the first place, and who had no need of a cash reward in the second. For Mr. Pinkerton had been left a great deal of money, quite by accident, in the blessed departure of Mrs. Pinkerton from this world; and he still had it, in spite of taxes, because he had never dared spend more than a shilling at a time for fear she would come back, bridging the gap of eternity by the sheer horror of seeing him squander her money.

Very cautiously he pushed open the door of the hall . . . and stopped dead for the third time. The small, hushed room was full of men, and they were all elegantly attired in evening dress.

He had not thought of that. Even if he had, the ancient green suit packed away in mothballs in the at-

tic box-room in Golder's Green would never have done. He stood staring miserably down at his shabby gray lounge suit (Tottenham Court Road, three guineas), one hand fumbling at his purple string tie and his narrow celluloid collar, suddenly chokingly tight round his scrawny little neck, the other clutching painfully at his brown bowler hat.

Then he reached back at the door-knob. But it was too late.

The rich, charming, and rather amused voice of the great sportsman, Mr. Usher, came across rows of immaculate pink-pated old gentlemen.

"There's a place here, sir."

He indicated a spot in the front row. Mr. Pinkerton swallowed very hard. The pink-pated old gentlemen were all staring at him. Sir Timothy would be one of them, of course. There was nothing for it. Mr. Pinkerton could never have told how he got to the empty seat next to another empty seat in the front row. He sat down, cold perspiration in tiny dots on his gray forehead, his eyes fixed mechanically on the lecturer and the stuffed shark's head on the table behind him, with the chromium barbs of a harpoon protruding from it.

All he could see was the body outside, draped on the iron palings, and the dark pool of blood gathering, viscid-slow, on the pavement. Mr. Usher was no doubt most lucid and interesting, but at the end,

when he was coming to a brilliant close, Mr. Pinkerton could not have told whether you fished for whales with a fly or a gaff.

"If Pounceby-Smith were here he could have told you the trouble we had in Guiana last year . . ."

Mr. Pinkerton sat up rigidly with a jerk, a queerly ominous emptiness in the pit of his stomach. And then it happened, as, of course, it was bound to happen. The door opened and a sergeant of police came in.

Mr. Usher's voice died down in slow surprise.

"Sorry to interrupt you, gentlemen," the sergeant said. "Does any gentleman here know Sir Timothy Pounceby-Smith?"

There was a general murmur.

"Then I'll ask you all to stay where you are for the present, if you please. Sir Timothy's body has been found in the road outside. He has been murdered."

In the stunned silence, in the choleric uproar that followed, Mr. Pinkerton, gray and shaken, realizing only too well what was about to happen, stared down at his feet. A sudden wave of nauseating fear surged through him. The toe of his right boot was splotched with blood.

He looked up. The sergeant was standing by him and he was looking down at the toe of Mr. Pinkerton's right boot with a curious intentness. His voice sounded, stolid

and polite, miles away. "Will you come along with me, sir, please?"

Mr. Pinkerton opened his mouth, but no sound came out of it. He went out through a foggy, noisy sea of white shirt fronts and pink jowls all reeling biliously together.

A voice spoke promptly as he entered the lodge.

"That's 'im all right, sir."

Mr. Pinkerton recognized the porter's voice. But he did not look at him. He was looking at the very large man seated at the table. The mild blue eyes of Inspector Bull were looking at him in an oddly placed mixture of doubt, annoyance, and distrust.

"'E must 'ave pinched Sir Timothy's card after 'e stabbed 'im, sir."

Inspector Bull's eyes moved from the dejected figure of his former landlord to the porter and rested on him for a moment.

"That'll be all for the time," he said. The sergeant closed the door behind him.

Mr. Pinkerton shook his head wretchedly in feeble protest.

"Hanky-panky doesn't pay," Inspector Bull said severely.

"I—I don't want to make you any trouble," Mr. Pinkerton said meekly. "He was—he was dead when I came along, and I didn't think anybody had seen me. The road was empty—"

"Yes," said Inspector Bull. He said it heavily, with a sinister emphasis. "That's the trouble. No one's come out of the Close. The road's a

dead end at the bottom, two constables were standing at the top. It *was* empty—and it had been empty for some time. The porter says there was at least fifteen minutes between the time the last people came and the time you showed up. It looks bad, Pinkerton."

Mr. Pinkerton moistened his lips and looked down at the toe of his boot. He looked away quickly with a shudder.

"How do you happen to be here, anyway?" Bull asked.

Mr. Pinkerton's heart sank with a sickening thud. The evidence was terrifyingly against him, his whole story was perfectly preposterous . . . and this sort of thing had happened so often. He really could not expect Bull to go on getting him out of trouble time and again. Not indefinitely.

"Sir Timothy asked me to come. He—he gave me his card."

Inspector Bull stared. "How did you come to know him, Pinkerton?" he asked coldly.

Mr. Pinkerton swallowed.

"Well, you see, I was in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and a lady was sitting on a bench. Pretty soon Sir Timothy came along. Of course, I didn't know it was Sir Timothy then. Well, you could see she'd been waiting for him. He sat down with her. Then, all of a sudden, she grabbed his arm and said something, and he got up and dashed off. Another man came along.

"But just before he'd got to the

bench the lady spotted the dispatch case the first chap had left. You could see she was scared. She shoved it through the back of the bench out onto the grass. Then she got up and said, 'Hullo, darling, isn't this lovely?—Let's go and have some tea,' but the new man wanted to sit down. And all of a sudden he spotted the case there, and said, 'Hullo, what's this?'"

Mr. Pinkerton hesitated, and blushed.

"So . . . well, I nipped over and said, 'Sorry, I left my case,' and the lady said, 'Oh yes. I noticed it when you moved,' and I . . . well, I took it back to my seat, and pretty soon they went away."

Inspector Bull shook his head very severely.

"Well, you see, she was very frightened."

Mr. Pinkerton hesitated again.

"And she was very pretty," he added lamely. The late Mrs. Pinkerton had never been at all pretty.

Bull shook his head still more severely.

"Then I waited a long time for the man to come and get his case, but he didn't, and finally the bell rang for closing the gardens, so I had to open the case to see whom it belonged to."

Mr. Pinkerton gazed anxiously at the Inspector. There was no sign of belief in the mild blue eyes. Still, Mr. Pinkerton thought desperately, if anyone in the world would believe it, it was Bull.

"I couldn't help seeing that it had a lot of bearer bonds in it . . . I mean, could I? But it did have Sir Timothy's name and address in it, too. So I took them to his house and said I'd found them. I didn't tell him about the lady shoving them off the bench, naturally, and apparently he didn't know it. He gave me a glass of sherry and asked me if I was interested in fishing, and he gave me a card for the lecture tonight."

Mr. Pinkerton looked hopefully across the table. Inspector Bull was making squares and circles on the sheet of paper in front of him. Mr. Pinkerton felt again, with a horrible sinking feeling, how utterly preposterous his story was—especially when told by a man not in evening dress who had blood spattered on his boot.

Bull looked up. "Sir Timothy was stabbed in the back," he said stolidly. "The divisional surgeon says the dagger went straight in under the shoulderblade. It must have been done by someone creeping up behind him in the street."

He continued to look very oddly at his former landlord.

"The queer thing is, Sir Timothy reported the loss of £10,000 in bearer bonds to the Yard. Tuesday evening," he said. "He never reported they'd been returned."

Mr. Pinkerton blinked in some excitement. For an instant he even forgot his own dismally involved position.

"Then it looks as if somebody that knew about the bonds had—had stabbed him to get them. Or—to keep them, of course. Doesn't it?"

Inspector Bull nodded.

Then Mr. Pinkerton remembered about himself. "So that, if I—I knew about the bonds, and I was the only one in the road—But then, why didn't I just keep them, in the first place?"

He stopped abruptly as another idea struck him.

"He let me in himself, that night, so nobody knows I went to the house," he said. "Oh dear!"

Inspector Bull continued to look at him.

"But then, what did I do with the—I mean, where did I put the weapon? Have you found it?"

Bull shook his head. "Not yet."

There was a tap at the door. A detective-constable entered.

"No trace of it, Inspector. We've been over everything."

He glanced at Mr. Pinkerton.

"The porter says he's sure this man went directly opposite to the hall door. He didn't see him dispose of anything, and he couldn't have done it outside or round here. It's not in the hall. Then there's another thing, Inspector. I caught the porter stowing this away in the coal-bin. He says he won it on Rhodes Scholar."

He handed Bull a small smudged bit of paper. Bull unfolded it and spread it out on the table. It was a

£5 note. Bull took a small jeweller's glass out of his pocket, fixed it to his eye, and studied the note.

"Bring him in," he said. "Keep after the dagger. It's bound to be about somewhere."

Mr. Pinkerton glanced timidly at the porter. He was deeply relieved. The shadow of the hangman seemed to be lifting a bit.

"Where did you get this, Shrubb?" Bull asked.

The porter hesitated. "I won it, on Rhodes Scholar, that's what I did," he said sullenly. "I put a pound on him—"

Inspector Bull scowled savagely. "Maybe you can explain how it's got fresh blood on it?" he said curtly.

The porter's face went suddenly white.

"I warn you—"

Shrubb shook his head.

"No ruddy use warnin' me, sir. I never murdered Sir Timothy. It was this bloke 'ere."

Mr. Pinkerton, edging a little nearer Inspector Bull, listened, completely fascinated. The porter, according to his story, had gone outside after Mr. Pinkerton had entered the hall, to see if Sir Timothy was coming, and found his body on the palings. He had started to put in a call when he saw the £5 note in the road next to Sir Timothy's hat. P. C. Nevins was coming down from the top of the road. Feeling that the obvious murderer had gone into the hall, and

could not get away, Nevins being already there, he had pocketed the note.

He had heard nothing during the quarter of an hour before. Most of that time he had not been in the lodge. Mr. Abel, the secretary of the Society, had told him to put a new globe in the cloakroom light.

"I 'ad to go up to the office to get a new one. I got back just as this—gentleman came in. I wasn't goin' to let 'im in, not till 'e pulls out one of Sir Timothy's cards, which 'e pinches off 'is dead body."

Mr. Pinkerton shuddered a little.

"All right," Bull said. "You wait outside."

He chewed one end of his tawny mustache and made more squares and circles on the paper in front of him. He shook his head.

"I can't see you killing somebody to get his bonds, Pinkerton," he said. "But it's queer. That passage was certainly empty. Let's see this secretary."

Mr. Pinkerton faced the members of the Society with considerably greater ease, now that he could stay close to Inspector Bull's very bulky figure. He noticed that the Society were not nearly so old or bald or rosy-gilled as they had seemed. In fact, one or two of them looked rather gray and definitely seedy. Especially Mr. Abel, the honorary secretary.

Sir Timothy Pounceby-Smith, it appeared, was president of the Society. He had secured the valuable

services of Mr. King Usher for the evening. Mr. Usher was just back from South America after a three months' cruise.

Mr. Abel could state positively that the last three members of the audience—barring Mr. Pinkerton—had arrived together, and they were agreed in maintaining that Sir Timothy's body was not on the paling outside when they came; Mr. Abel had, in fact spoken to Sir Timothy on the phone after their arrival—Sir Timothy had rung up to ask them to go on with it, as he would be a bit late. They had, however, waited; in fact, for half an hour. They had then begun, and had been going on for some fifteen minutes when Mr. Pinkerton arrived.

Mr. Abel had understood that Sir Timothy was introducing a guest. Moreover, he had recognized Mr. Pinkerton as the man he had seen leaving Sir Timothy's house in Chandros Street about 10 o'clock on Tuesday. He had dropped in to see Sir Timothy about the Society minutes.

It was true that the porter Shrubbs had been sent for a light globe. Mr. Usher had gone into the cloakroom and found that the light did not go on: Mr. Abel had struck a match and found the globe gone. It was annoying, as the lecturer had to arrange his exhibits there. They had previously had trouble about the disappearance of small items of that sort. Sir Timothy, whose com-

pany owned the Close, had felt Shrubbs responsible; in fact, he was under notice at the moment.

Bull chewed his mustache thoughtfully.

"Did he make trouble when he was given notice?"

"Shrubbs? Oh, no, he's been uncommonly civil about it."

"It's a strange case," Bull said placidly. "Sir Timothy was stabbed in the back through the heart. The assailant obviously came up behind him. It's clear also, from the testimony of several witnesses, that no person has left here since Sir Timothy came. Yet there's no weapon about. My men are certain about that. Hard to conceal it in such a place, just on the spur of the moment. Then there's that £5 note."

He looked intently at Mr. Abel, noting the nervous face, sparse blond hair, wispy blond mustache. Definitely on the weak side.

"The £5 note?" said Mr. King Usher. Mr. Pinkerton noticed his quick glance at the secretary.

"I say, Abel. That 'wouldn't—" He stopped abruptly.

"Wouldn't what, sir?" Bull asked.

Mr. Usher ran his lean fingers through his dark sun-bleached hair. Mr. Pinkerton noticed that his frosty blue eyes were definitely thoughtful.

"Oh, nothing, nothing at all," he said. "What's this about a £5 note?"

Bull explained. Both men shook

their heads. A few members gathered round shook theirs. It was very odd.

"Do you recall where you were, Mr. Abel, at, say, twenty minutes past 9?" Bull said.

Mr. Pinkerton, peering round his elbow, stared up at the honorary secretary.

"Just here, I imagine, Inspector."

Mr. Usher spoke.

"I say, Abel, wasn't it just about then we were hunting the porter? I noticed, because I thought if I didn't get on with it, I'd have to cut out half the slides."

Mr. Abel laughed nervously. "Of course, I'd forgotten. But Shrubbs wasn't at the lodge. Do you remember? I'd sent him after a table in the cellar."

Something occurred to Mr. Pinkerton suddenly. The germ of an idea came into his head.

"It's most annoying," Mr. Abel said, "how we have to leave things till the last moment. Of course, it's most kind of Sir Timothy to let us use this room. It's their directors' room, really."

Mr. Pinkerton caught himself with a great effort from making a sudden choking gasp of excitement. He tugged at Inspector Bull's sleeve with shaking fingers. The three men looked down at him. There was surprise on Bull's face, nervous anxiety on Mr. Abel's, a slight amusement on the great sportsman's.

Mr. Pinkerton mastered himself.

"May I take your torch?" he whispered.

In one moment he was scuttling back across the court. The lodge was empty. He looked about. There was a ragged curtain in the corner, behind it a small door. Mr. Pinkerton opened it and turned his light up the narrow staircase. It would lead to the rooms above the gate. He closed the door quickly behind him with a sigh of relief and a very pleasant feeling of safety. He could quite easily feel a sharp point under his own left shoulderblade.

At the top of the little staircase he hurried along a narrow hall to the left, stopped at the head of a wider stairs leading down into the court, then opened the door to his right and turned his beam into a small room opening on the front. It was not hard—certainly not after his many years as potboy and scullery-maid in his wife's lodging-house in Golder's Green—to recognize it instantly as the porter's bedroom.

Mr. Pinkerton stood for an instant there, trembling with excitement, looking about him: at the floor, at the grate in the corner. He crossed to the window, opened it cautiously, and peered out and down. The white ball of light from the powerful torch fell on the pavement just below. Sir Timothy was gone; but the dark splotch of blood was still there.

Mr. Pinkerton caught his breath sharply. He disregarded the con-

stable at the gate, peering curiously up at him, leaned far out of the window and brought the beam slowly up the white plaster face of the wall.

Then he shouted down at the constable. "Tell Inspector Bull to come!"

Inspector Bull crowded his great shoulders through the window, sweeping the torch up and down.

"It's there, you see," Mr. Pinkerton said timidly.

"What's where?" said Bull.

"Blood," Mr. Pinkerton said. "Just a spot of blood on the plaster."

Bull drew back into the room.

"He was stabbed from behind—" Bull began.

"No, no, he wasn't at all!" Mr. Pinkerton cried. "That's the whole point! That's just what you were supposed to think! But he wasn't. The road *was* empty!"

"He was just coming in," Mr. Pinkerton said quickly. "He was directly under this window, of course, and he went over to pick up a £5 note. The note was dropped from this window, of course—just so that he *would* bend over. And when he did . . . well, of course, then he was a perfect target. And when he was struck, why, he automatically straightened up, and then collapsed and was caught there on the paling."

"Then he wiped the weapon clean and burned the paper he'd wiped it with—in the grate there."

"And went out and got the

note?" Bull said slowly. He crossed to the grate. The beam rested for an instant on the charred paper.

"Well," he said, "have you found the weapon then, man?"

Mr. Pinkerton adjusted his steel-rimmed spectacles, blinking a little. "Well," he said, "I know what it is. And I *think* I can find it."

It was the third time that he had confronted the Society for the Prevention of the Sale of Game Fish for Domestic Purposes. For a moment, in the suddenly silent little hall with all the faces turned toward him, he stood irresolute, staring timidly about. Then his face lighted, and he marched—insofar as a gray little rabbit of a man can be said to march—up to the platform, where the honorary secretary stood by the lecturer.

Mr. Pinkerton reached out one hand and drew the chromium-plated harpoon out of the head of Mr. King Usher's preserved shark. It came out quite readily, to his great relief: a shining steel shaft with a dagger point—leaving behind it, where they had been neatly inserted, the barbs that apparently held it there.

Mr. Pinkerton turned and held it up so that Inspector Bull could see the thin line attached to the

butt, turned back to the table, and picked up the small harpoon gun with its cylindrical reel.

Then he darted to Inspector Bull's side, for there was a look of cold ferocity on Mr. King Usher's handsome face that he did not like at all.

"It was quite simple, really," Mr. Pinkerton said, a little breathlessly. "He'd filed off the barbs that make the harpoon stick. He pinched the light globe to get rid of the secretary and the porter, and he ran up to the porter's room and just shot Sir Timothy as he was coming in, with this gun. It—it must have a very light charge; and would make hardly any noise. Then he reeled in the harpoon, and it was easy—and very clever too—when he'd got back to the cloakroom to hide it in the most obvious possible place, in front of everybody."

It was possibly a bit late, but the proprietor of the King's Arms pushed two pints of bitter across the bar. Mr. Pinkerton raised his.

"It wasn't quite fair, not really," he said. "You see, when I went back to the lecture hall with you, I wasn't so . . . so upset. And I recognized Mr. King Usher. He was the husband of the lady on the park bench."

Ellery Queen

A Pair of Queens

I: The Black Ledger

THE CASE OF THE BLACK LEDGER was one of the biggest cases Ellery ever undertook, and its size was not reduced by the littleness of the effort involved. It consisted merely in acting as an errand boy, the errand being to take the ledger from the City of New York to Washington, D. C.

Why the transportation from one city to another of an account book worth perhaps three dollars should be a problem, why Ellery was the messenger instead of a federal agent, why he deliberately set forth on his mission alone, without even a weapon . . . the answers to these engrossing questions may be found in the proper place, which is not here. This story begins where that one ends.

In appearance the Black Ledger was unexciting. It had a hard binding lined with black leatherette which was scraped along the edges, its dimensions were six inches by eight and one-half inches, and it contained 52 thick, limp ledger pages rule-printed in blue and red lines, and all rather dirty. And yet it was one of the most infamous and historic volumes in the library of American crime. For on the

blue lines of those 52 jammed pages were written the names and the addresses of all the important regional distributors of illegal narcotics in the United States, and the list was in the handwriting of the master of the ring.

In the spreading epidemic of dope addiction which was plaguing the country, the federal authorities wanted this list desperately. The Black Ledger was a monstrous indiscretion, and to keep it from reaching Washington the quiet monster who had compiled it would stop at literally nothing. The two government agents who secured possession of it paid for their triumph with their lives. But by that time the Black Ledger was—for the moment—safe in New York.

At this point Ellery entered the problem.

The place where he examined the ledger and accepted the mission and prepared to carry it out was, they were positive, under surveillance. The chieftain of this continent-wide criminal organization was no petty gang lord. He was a genius of withered soul, with immense power, resources, and con-

nections. Ordinary methods were bound to fail against him. At the least, a show of force on the spot might turn the entire area into a bloody battlefield, causing the deaths of innocent people. So Ellery's plan was accepted.

A drawing room on the Capitol Limited was reserved for him officially by telephone, and at the appointed time Ellery went down into the streets.

The fall day was gray, with raw skies, and Ellery had hung an umbrella with a bamboo handle over his left arm. He was wearing a lined topcoat and he carried a brief case.

Ellery seemed unaware that from the instant his foot touched the pavement his life expectancy dwindled almost to the vanishing point. Smoking his big brier pipe placidly, he stepped to the curb and glanced around as if for a taxicab.

Two things happened at once. His arms were seized from behind and a seven-passenger sedan shot to the curb and blocked him off.

The next moment he was in the car, prisoner of four large men whose complete silence was more disquieting than threats.

Ellery was not surprised when the sedan deposited them at Pennsylvania Station and three of his four silent captors strolled him unarguably through Gate 3 down into the Capitol Limited and Drawing Room A of the fifth car, which was his reservation. Two of the large

men took him in and one of them carefully bolted the drawing-room door.

As Ellery had expected, the monster was waiting for him. He occupied the only armchair—an immaculately dressed man of middle age with grudging pale hair parted cleverly in the middle and hot, sore-looking eyes. This creature was a millionaire, thought Ellery, a millionaire who had made his millions by destroying the will and health and future of thousands of foolish people, many of them adolescents.

And Ellery said, "You had the phone tapped, of course."

The narcotics king did not reply. He glanced at the larger of his two strong-arm men, the one with the boneless nose.

Nose said instantly, "He didn't speak to nobody when he come out. Nobody come near him. He didn't touch nothing. He didn't drop nothing."

The monster in the chair glanced at the other large man, the one with the tic in his right eyelid.

"Nobody else gets out up there," said Tic. "And Al is keeping in touch by the train phone from the lounge."

The sore eyes now turned their full animal suffering on Ellery. "You want to live?" He had a soft, womanish voice.

"As much as the next man," said Ellery, trying to keep his tongue from rattling.

"Then hand it over."

Ellery swallowed and said, "Oh, come."

Nose grinned, but the monster said, "No. First open his bag."

Nose dumped the contents of Ellery's brief case on the floor. It consisted of a single object, a crisp new Manhattan telephone directory.

"Nothing else in the bag?"

"Not a thing." Nose tossed the empty brief case to one side. He picked up the big directory and riffled it twice.

"Screwy thing to be lugging around," remarked Tic.

"My favorite train reading," said Ellery. He felt urgently like asking for a drink of water, but he decided against it.

"Not in here," said Nose.

"His coat and hat."

Nose shucked him like an ear of corn while Tic examined Ellery's snapbrim.

"It wouldn't be in here," he complained. "It's too big."

Nose jeered. "With the cover it's too big. This is a smart operator. He tore out the pages and crumbled 'em."

"But fifty-two pages," protested Tic.

The monster said nothing. His red glance was fixed on the furled umbrella, which Ellery had retrieved and was clutching. Suddenly he reached over and yanked. He removed the umbrella cover slowly and slowly pressed the catch and pushed. The umbrella opened. After a moment he tossed it away.

Nose said, "Not in the coat." The lining lay on the floor; he had torn the pockets out, and had ripped open the seams wherever the material doubled over.

"Strip him."

Ellery felt his knees buckle under the pain of Nose's grip. Tic did the stripping, without kindness. Sore Eyes watched the denuding process with the unblinking patience of a crocodile.

"Leave me my shorts!" said Ellery wildly.

They left him nothing. Mother-naked, he was permitted to wrap himself in the wreck of his topcoat, crouch in a chair, and smoke his pipe. It tasted like fuming brass, but it gave him comfort.

He reached for the Manhattan telephone book just as the Capitol Limited pulled out of Pennsylvania Station. He knew that the conductor was taken care of and that there would be no interruptions until he reached Washington—if indeed he ever reached it.

But he was wrong. At Newark, when the train stopped, a man entered the drawing room. Nose called him Doc. Doc, a fat little man with three chins and no hair, was carrying a black bag. He eyed Ellery with the brisk anticipation of a professor approaching the cadaver tank in a dissecting room.

Ellery clutched the Manhattan directory and braced himself.

The long Limited was roaring

through New Brunswick when Doc, busily at work, referred to himself jestingly as Secretary of the Interior. By the time the train was rolling into the Trenton station Doc was no longer jesting: he was perspiring.

Shutting his bag, he made his report to the man in the armchair in a strained voice.

It was negative.

The man in the armchair said to Tic, "Tell Al to phone Philly. I want Jig with some equipment." Then he looked at Ellery and for the first time showed his false teeth in a nightmarish smile. "Secret writing," he said softly. "Just in case."

Jig got on at North Philadelphia. At Wilmington, Nose made some exterior reports, and Jig completed them. Jig was a tall skinny man with no shoulders and a clubfoot.

The Black Ledger, whole or in parts, was not in Ellery's suit, as the ruins of his trousers and jacket testified. His shirt, necktie, undershirt, shorts, and socks had been carefully manhandled. His shoes had been tapped, probed, slit, and all but turned inside out. Even his belt, an unmistakably single strip of cowhide, had been cut apart.

All his possessions were on display. Keys and coins were pronounced solid. His wallet contained \$97, a torn money-order stub, a New York State operator's license, a dues receipt from the Mystery

Writers of America, five business cards, and seven jottings of ideas for stories. His check-book had been gone over page by page, including the stubs. His tobacco pouch had been found to contain only pipe tobacco, and an unopened pack of cigarettes was opened and found to contain only cigarette tobacco and perfectly innocent cigarette paper. A letter from his publisher demanded the return of galley proofs three weeks overdue, and a letter postmarked Orangeburg, New York, from a man signing himself Yore Frend Joe threatened to kill Ellery Queen unless Ellery Queen saved the writer from being killed by an invisible enemy.

And Jig caressed his Adam's apple and said that nothing from, on, or about the guy concealed secret writing—nothing. This covered every surface capable of taking a fluid impression, not excluding the guy's epidermis. Jig used the word epidermis.

By this time they were approaching Elkton, Maryland.

The monster sucked his lower lip in silence.

"Maybe," said the Nose in the silence, "maybe he memorized the names . . . huh?"

"Yeah!" Tic looked relieved. "They could still have the book back in New York and he's carrying it all in his head."

The man in the chair looked up. "There's twenty-eight names to a

page, and fifty-two pages—almost fifteen hundred names. Who is he, Einstein?" He said suddenly, "That phone book you picked up again. What's the gag?"

Ellery tamped a fresh load into his pipe to give his fingers something to do. "Some people relax with mystery stories. I can't—I write them. The phone book does it for me."

"I bet." The sore eyes glittered. "Jig, give that book the business!"

Nose tore it from Ellery's hand.

"But I've already tested it for secret writing," said Jig.

"To hell with secret writing. We're after a list of names. And in a New York phone book you got about every kind of name there is! Look for marks next to names—pinpricks, pencil dots, impressions of nails—anything!"

"Would someone mind," Ellery asked plaintively, "giving me a light?"

They were pulling into Washington when Jig came back from the compartment in which he had set up his impromptu laboratory.

"No marks," he mumbled. "No nothing. It's just the way it came off the press."

"And nobody's still tried to leave that joint in New York we got covered," muttered Tic. "Al phoned from Baltimore."

The man in the chair said slowly, "So he's a decoy after all. They figured they'd pull us off with him while somebody else got away. On-

ly they got another figure coming. Sooner or later the real boy scout's got to try to sneak out of that building. Tic, get Al to phone New York and tell Manno if anybody gets away he can start cutting his own throat . . . Okay, you." He looked at Ellery. "You can get dressed now."

The Capitol Limited was standing in the Washington terminal when Ellery, looking more like a hobo than a respectable gentleman-writer-detective, picked up his umbrella and said with pale whimsicality, "Do I get shot in the back as I leave, or are all bets off?"

"Wait a minute," said the monster.

"Yes?" said Ellery, nervously gripping his umbrella.

"Where you going with the umbrella?"

"Umbrella?" Ellery glanced blankly down at it. "Why, you examined this yourself—"

"So that was it," and now the womanish voice had a vicious sting. "I examined it, all right—the wrong part! *It's in the bamboo handle.* You rolled up the pages of the ledger and stuffed them into the hollow head of that bumbershoot! Take it from him!"

Ellery found himself in Tic's grip staring fascinated as Nose demolished the umbrella handle.

And when it was thoroughly demolished there was nothing on the floor of the drawing room but some curved splinters of bamboo.

The monster rose, his sore eyes smoldering. "Boot him," he choked, "boot him out of here!"

Twenty-six minutes later Ellery was escorted into the private office of a very important executive of a very important branch of the government in a very important building in Washington.

"I'm the messenger from New York," said Ellery, "and I've brought you the Black Ledger."

Ellery did not see the monster again until the trial in federal court. They met in the corridor during a recess. The narcotics king was surrounded by bailiffs and lawyers and newspapermen, and he was looking exactly like a criminal who expects the worst. Nevertheless, the moment he spied Ellery his face brightened and he jumped forward, seized Ellery by the arm, and pulled him aside.

"Keep those monkeys away from here a minute!" he shouted, and then he said piteously, "Queen, you're a life-saver. This thing's been driving me bats. Ever since you outsmarted me on that damn train, I've been asking myself how you did it. It wasn't on you, it wasn't in you, it wasn't in that phone book or umbrella. So where was it? Would you please tell me?"

"I don't mind kicking a man when he's down," said Ellery coldly, "not when he's a so-called man like you. Certainly I'll tell you. The phone book and umbrella were red

herrings. I had to keep you occupied with your own cleverness. The ledger never left my hand."

"What are you giving me?" howled the monster.

"It was the size of the ledger and the quantity of its contents that threw you. You never stopped to think that size and quantity can be reduced."

"Huh?"

"Microfilm," said Ellery. "Thirteen feet of film less than a half-inch in width. When it was wound up in a tight roll . . ."

"But in your *hand*," said the monster dazedly. "I'd have bet a million to one you couldn't have palmed anything!"

"I'd hardly have taken a foolish risk like that," said Ellery. "No, the roll of film was in something—in fact, in two things. And I kept applying matches to it regularly all the way from New York to Washington."

"Matches! You set *fire* to it?"

"Nice touch, don't you think? Oh, it was in a fireproof container—an old cartridge shell just big enough to hold it, and capped tightly. The container was tucked away in the bottom of my pipe bowl—the only thing I carried you didn't search. It made a brassy smoke," said Ellery, "but when I think of all those kids who've learned to smoke your marijuana and shoot themselves full of your heroin, I'd say it was worth it—wouldn't you?"

Ellery Queen

II: The Gamblers' Club

ELLERY WAS ADMITTED INTO THE sacred mysteries of The Gamblers' Club one winter morning, when a stainless town car which the slush of 87th Street seemed unable to sully deposited three men on his doorstep. Inspector Queen, who was home that morning working on a confidential report, raised his birdy brows at the size of the car and retired with his papers to the study—not, however, without leaving the door ajar the irreducible minimum for eavesdropping.

The three men introduced themselves as Charles Van Wyne, Cornelius Lewis and Gorman Fitch. Van Wyne was slender and bluish, Lewis was huge and brown, and Fitch was roly-poly and pink.

The Gamblers' Club, they explained to Ellery, was an association of seventeen retired businessmen with a passion for gambling and the means to indulge in it. In addition to the conventional group games of chance played in the club-rooms, members were pledged to suggest unusual gambling adventures to one another on an individual basis, being expected in this oath-bound obligation to display imagination and ingenuity. Suggestions were made by mail, anonymously, on special letterheads available to members only.

"Why anonymously?" asked Ellery, fascinated.

"Well, when someone's been hurt," squeaked pink little Mr. Fitch, "we don't want him holding a grudge."

"Of course, we're all reliable characters," murmured Van Wyne, nibbling the head of his stick. "Quite the whole point of the Club."

"But apparently someone's developed an unreliable streak. Is that it?" Ellery asked.

"You tell it, Van Wyne," boomed the large Mr. Lewis.

"Lewis dropped in on me this morning," said Van Wyne abruptly, "to ask if I happened to be a party to a certain individual Club gamble he'd been enjoying, and when we compared notes we found we were both in the same thing. The two of us wondered if anyone else was in it and, since Mr. Fitch lives in my neighborhood, we dropped in on him and, sure enough, he was involved, too.

"Exactly three weeks ago each of us received a long envelope in the morning mail, with a typewritten message on Club stationery—quite in order—giving us a tip on the market. The stock suggested is unstable as the deuce—way up one day and way down the next—mak-

ing it a real gamble, so each of us bought. It took a big jump, and we cleaned up. Two weeks ago this morning we each received a second letter proposing the purchase of another stock, equally jittery. Again we made a lot of money.

"And just one week ago today—"

"The same thing," rumbled Cornelius Lewis impatiently.

"You want to know," asked Ellery, "how he does it?"

"Oh, we know how he does it," said pudgy Mr. Fitch testily. "He's got inside information, of course. It's not that—"

"Then it's the letter you all received this morning."

The big ex-banker glowered. "How the devil did you know we got letters today?"

"Let's call him Mr. X," said Ellery, getting into the spirit of the thing. "Mr. X's first letter came three weeks ago today, his second two weeks ago today, his third one week ago today—so it was a pretty good bet, Mr. Lewis, that a fourth came today. What's disturbing you about it, gentlemen?"

Charles Van Wyne produced a long envelope. "Read it, Mr. Queen."

The envelope was of fine quality. It had no imprint or return address. Van Wyne's name and address were typewritten, and from the postmark it had been mailed the previous night.

Ellery removed from it a sheet of

weighty stationery with a tony THE GAMBLERS' CLUB at the top in gold engraving:

"Dear Fellow Club Member:

How did you like my trio of market tips? Now something new has come up and it looks like the best yet. Secrecy is important, though, and I have to handle it personally or it's all off. If you'll gamble \$25,000 on a hot chance to double it in seven days, no questions asked, leave the cash at the foot of Dominicus Pike's grave in Trinity churchyard tomorrow at 3:30 A.M. on the button. No prying, or you'll spoil the deal."

There was no signature.

"Now I've told Lewis," said Van Wyne, "that this is a sporting gamble. The man's proved himself. I'm for it."

"I don't say I'm not," growled Cornelius Lewis. "The only thing is—"

"Isn't that why we're here?" demanded Gorman Fitch with a sniff. "What do you think, Queen? This sound on the level to you?"

"Fitch, you're impugning the integrity of a fellow-member," said Van Wyne coldly.

"I'm just asking a question!"

"It's possible, Van Wyne, isn't it?" grumbled Lewis. "And if somebody's turned crooked, that's the end of the Club, and you know it. What's your opinion, Queen?"

"Sounds good to me," murmured Ellery. "But I'd want to dig

a bit before committing myself. Did either of you other gentlemen bring your letter of this morning with you?"

"Left mine home," stated Lewis.

"They're practically identical with Van Wyne's," objected Fitch.

"I'd like to see them, nevertheless, envelope and all. Suppose you send them right over to me by messenger. I'll phone the three of you before noon."

The moment the front door had closed, the study door opened; and there was Inspector Queen, incredulous.

"Did I hear right?" snapped Ellery's father. "Did you say to those three this sounds 'good' to you? Good for what, laughs?"

"The trouble with you," said Ellery in a pained way, "is that you've got no gambling blood. Why not wait for developments?"

Emerging from the study again just before noon, Inspector Queen found his celebrated son examining two envelopes and their contents. Cornelius Lewis's envelope, postmarked the night before, was exactly like the one Charles Van Wyne had received, and the wording on the Club letterhead was the same except that where Van Wyne's time for depositing the \$25,000 at the Trinity Church grave had been 3:30 A.M., Lewis's was to be at 3:45 A.M. The small plain envelope Gorman Fitch had received, also postmarked the previ-

ous night, contained the same message on Club stationery except that Fitch was to deposit his package of cash at 4:00 A.M.

"I suppose," said the Inspector, "you're going to recommend that your three clients follow these instructions to the letter?"

"Sure thing," said Ellery cheerfully; and he telephoned his approval to Van Wyne, Lewis, and Fitch in turn.

"Are you out of your mind, Ellery?" howled Inspector Queen as Ellery hung up for the third time. "The only sure thing in this racket is that three suckers are going to be taken for twenty-five thousand lollipops apiece!"

"Racket?" murmured the son.

The old gentleman controlled himself. "Look. This smoothie operates on a group of—"

"Mr. X? And what do you mean by 'group'? Specify."

"Seventeen! One of the seventeen Club members has gone sour. Maybe he's broke. He picks a stock that's always acting like a pogo stick and he writes half the members to play this stock to go up, the other half to play it to go down. Whichever way the stock moves, half the members lose, *but the other half win*, and he's a genius.

"Step two: He ignores the losers in the first operation and sends his second tip only to the winners—"

"Figures," pleaded Ellery. "Exactly how many would receive the second tip?"

"Half the original sixteen! Eight, the eight first winners. Now he tips half these eight to play the stock up, the other half to play it down. Again, half have to win—"

"Number, please," said Ellery.

"Can't you do kindergarten arithmetic? Half of eight is four! Now he's got four two-time winners. He picks another kangaroo stock, sends the third letter, this time telling half the four to play the stock up, the other half to play it down. So now he's got his three-times-winning chumps primed and he's ready to spring the big one. He sends his fourth letter—"

"To how many?" inquired Ellery.

"To the two remaining winners!"

"That's what it should boil down to, all right," mourned Ellery. "The only thing is, it doesn't. *We've got three.*"

Slowly, the Inspector sat down.

"An extra man," said Ellery. "Question: Who is he, and how could he possibly defy the laws of mathematics? Answer: He can't, so he's the con man himself, our friend Mr. X, not one of the suckers at all."

"Van Wyne, Lewis, or Fitch. One of them's the bunco . . ."

"I'm afraid so. Whichever one of the three he is, this morning, to his annoyance, he found himself in a consultation with his two victims. The letters setting up the graveyard payoff had been mailed last night and were already delivered, so he

couldn't do anything about *them*. He could only pretend he'd been a three-times winner, too! If I warned his innocents to lay off, Mr. X would simply fail to show up to-night at Trinity. But if I didn't seem suspicious or a threat, he'd go through with his scheme. Does it figure?"

"Like Einstein," chortled the Inspector; and he hurried downtown to Police Headquarters to make certain arrangements about a churchyard and the grave of one Dominicus Pike.

Ghosts walked about Broadway and Wall Street that night, but by 1:00 A.M. they had subsided behind various illustrious headstones in the churchyard, and the area grew quiet.

Ellery insisted that his father share George Washington's old pew in the chapel with him, murmuring something about the long wintry wait and the Father of Truth.

But at 3:15 the Queens were skulking behind one of Mother Trinity's skirts. At 3:30 A.M. on the nose the slender shadow of Charles Van Wyne fell eagerly across the grave of Dominicus Pike.

It deposited something on the frozen ground and slithered away.

At 3:45 the black hulk of Cornelius Lewis appeared, something dropped behind the headstone, and the black hulk melted away.

At the last stroke of 4:00 A.M. the dumpy blur that was Gorman

Fitch repeated the process, and then he, too, disappeared.

"Whichever he is, he's taking no chances," chattered Inspector Queen. "If anything went wrong, he'd be one of the suckers depositing his twenty-five grand. Now he'll wait a while. Then he'll sneak back to pick up the cash. I wonder which one it'll turn out to be."

"Why, Dad," said Ellery in an amazed undertone as he turned to his parent, "do you mean to say you don't *know*?"

"No, I don't," whispered the Inspector malevolently. "And don't tell me you do!"

Ellery sighed. "Of course I do. . . . X certainly didn't send any letters to himself—he didn't expect to have to enter the problem as a 'victim' at all. When accident forced him into it yesterday morning, he was in a jam. Yes, he could lie to the other two and *say* he had also received the fourth letter, but I asked him to produce it—along with the envelope. To look genuine the envelope he gave me had to have the same postmark as the other two—the postmark of the night before! But that was impossible—it

was now the morning after, and our conspirator found himself faced with a bit of a problem.

"So X did the best he could. He looked through his legitimate morning mail and found a plain envelope addressed to him, with no return address, which bore the correct postmark of the previous night; and he sent that envelope along to me with the note he had hastily typed as an enclosure. The only trouble was, the envelope was of a *different size* from the ones he'd been sending his victims. He hoped, I suppose, that I wouldn't notice the discrepancy in the sizes."

"Van Wyne's envelope was *long* . . ." the Inspector said.

"And Lewis's was identical with Van Wyne's. But the third envelope," said Ellery, "was a *small* envelope, and since that was the one sent over to me by—"

A shout profaned the churchyard, lights popped, and in their beams a figure was caught kneeling over three bundles on the grave like a boy in a melon patch. It was the pudgy little figure of Gorman Fitch.



Dorothy L. Sayers

The Leopard Lady

Here is what we once wrote about this unusual tale, written by the creator of Lord Peter Wimsey: "Read the first three pages; if then you can put the story down, you are suffering from hardening of the imagination."

IF THE BOY IS IN YOUR WAY," SAID a voice in Tressider's ear, "ask at Rapallo's for Smith & Smith."

Tressider started and looked round. There was nobody near him—unless you counted the bookstall clerk, and the aged gentleman with crooked pince-nez halfway down his nose, who stood poring over a copy of *Blackwood*. Obviously, neither of these two could have uttered that sinister whisper. A yard or two away stood a porter, wearily explaining to a militant woman and a dejected little man that the 5:30 having now gone there was no other train before 9:15. All three were utter strangers to Tressider. He shook himself. It must have been his own subconscious wish that had externalised itself in this curious form. He must keep a hold on himself. Hidden wishes that took shape as audible promptings and whisperings were apt to lead to Colney Hatch—or Broadmoor.

But what in the world had suggested the names "Rapallo's" and "Smith & Smith"? Rapallo—that was a town in Italy or somewhere,

he fancied. But the word had come to him as "Rapallo's," as though it were the name of a firm or a person. And "Smith & Smith," too. Fantastic. Then he glanced up at the bookstall. Of course, yes—"W. H. Smith & Son"; that must have been the point from which the suggestion had started, and his repressed desires had somehow pushed their message past his censor in that preposterous sentence.

"If the boy is in your way, ask at Rapallo's for Smith & Smith."

He let his eye wander over the books and magazines spread out on the stall. Was there anything—yes, there was. A pile of little red books, of which the topmost bore the title: "How to ask for What you Want in ITALY." There was the other factor of the equation. "Italy" had been the match laid to the train, and the resulting spark had been, queerly but understandably enough, "Rapallo's."

Satisfied, he handed a shilling across the stall and asked for the *Strand Magazine*. He tucked his purchase under his arm and then,

glancing at the station clock, decided that he had just time for a quick one before his train went. He turned into the buffet, pausing on the way to buy a packet of cigarettes at the kiosk, where the militant woman was already arming herself with milk-chocolate against her wait for the 9:15. He noticed, with a certain grim satisfaction, that the dejected man had made his escape, and was not altogether surprised to encounter him again in the buffet, hurriedly absorbing something yellow out of a glass.

He was some little time getting served, for there was quite a crowd about the bar. But even if he did miss his train, there was another in twenty minutes' time, and his odd experience had shaken him. The old gentleman with *Blackwood's* had drifted up to the door by the time he left, and, indeed, nearly collided with Tressider in his short-sighted progress. Tressider absently apologised for what was not his fault, and made for the barrier. Here there was again a trifling delay while he searched for his ticket, and a porter who stood beside him with some hand-luggage eventually lost patience and pushed past him with a brief, "By your leave, sir." Eventually, however, he found himself in a first-class carriage with four minutes to spare.

He threw his hat up on the rack and himself into a corner seat, and immediately, with an automatic anxiety to banish his own thoughts,

opened his magazine. As he did so, a card fluttered from between the leaves onto his knee. With an exclamation of impatience directed against the advertisers who filled the pages of magazines with insets, he picked it up, intending to throw it under the seat. A line of black capitals caught his eyes:

SMITH & SMITH

and beneath, in smaller type:

REMOVALS

He turned the card over. It was about the size of an "At Home" card. The other side was completely blank. There was no address; no explanation. An impulse seized him. He snatched up his hat and made for the door. The train was moving as he sprang out, and he staggered as his feet touched the platform. A porter sprang to his side with a warning shout.

"Shouldn't do that, sir," said the man, reprovingly.

"All right, all right," said Tressider, "I've left something behind."

"That's dangerous, that is," said the porter. "Against regulations."

"Oh, all right," said Tressider, fumbling for a coin. As he handed it over, he recognised the porter as the man who had jostled him at the barrier and had stood behind him at the bookstall talking to the militant woman and the dejected man. He dismissed the man hastily, feeling unaccountably uneasy under his official eye. He ran past the bar-

rier with a hasty word to the ticket collector who still stood there, and made his way back to the bookstall.

"*Strand Magazine*," he demanded, curtly, and then, thinking he caught an astonished expression in the eye of the clerk, he muttered: "Dropped the other."

The clerk said nothing, but handed over the magazine and accepted Tressider's shilling. Only when he was turning away did Tressider realise that he was still clutching the original copy of the *Strand* under his arm. Well, let the man think what he liked.

Unable to wait, he dived into the General Waiting Room and shook the new *Strand* open. Several insets flew out—one about learning new languages by gramophone, one about Insurance, one about Hire Purchase Payments. He gathered them up and tossed them aside again. Then he examined the magazine, page by page. There was no white card with the name "Smith & Smith."

He stood, trembling, in the dusty gas-light of the waiting-room. Had he imagined the card? Was his brain playing tricks with him again? He could not remember what he had done with the card. He searched both magazines and all his pockets. It was not there. He must have left it in the train.

He *must* have left it in the train.

Sweat broke out upon his forehead. It was a terrible thing to go mad. If he had not seen that card—

but he *had* seen it. He could see the shape and spacing of the black capitals distinctly.

After a moment or two, an idea came to him. A firm that advertised itself must have an address, perhaps a telephone number. But, of course, not necessarily in London. Those magazines went all over the world. What was the good of advertising without a name or address? Still, he would look. The words "Smith & Smith, Removals," in the London Telephone Directory would steady his nerves considerably.

He went out and sought the nearest telephone cabinet. The directory hung there on its stout chain. Only when he opened it did he realise how many hundred firms called "Smith & Smith" there might be in London. The small print made his eyes ache, but he persevered, and was at length rewarded by finding an entry: "Smith & Smith, Frntre Removrs & Haulage Cntrctrs," with an address in Greenwich.

That should have satisfied him, but it did not. He could not believe that a firm of Furniture Removers and Haulage Contractors at Greenwich would advertise, without address, in a magazine of world-wide circulation. Only firms whose name was a household word could do that kind of thing. And besides, in that second *Strand* there had been no advertisement.

Then how had the card got

there? Had the bookstall clerk slipped it in? Or the militant woman who had stood beside him at the tobacco kiosk? Or the dejected man sipping whisky and soda in the buffet? Or the old gentleman who had passed him in the entrance? Or the porter who had waited behind him at the barrier? It came suddenly into his mind that all these five had been near him when he had heard the voice of his repressed wish whisper so persuasively, and so objectively:

"If the boy is in your way, ask at Rapallo's for Smith & Smith."

With a kind of greedy reluctance, he turned the pages of the Telephone Directory backwards to R.

There it was. There could be no mistake about it this time.

"Rapallo's Sandwich & Cocktail Bar,"

with an address in Conduit Street.

A minute later, Tressider was hailing a taxi outside the station. His wife would be expecting him, but she must wait. He had often been detained in town before. He gave the taxi the Conduit Street address.

It was a small place, but had nothing sinister about it. Clean, white-draped tables with individual lights and a big mahogany bar, whose wide semi-circle took up nearly half the available floor-space. The door closed behind Tressider with a comfortable, chuckling click. He went up to the bar and, with an

indescribable fluttering of the heart, said to the white-coated attendant: "I was told to ask here for Messrs. Smith & Smith."

"What name, sir?" asked the man, showing neither hesitation nor surprise.

"Jones," said Tressider, uninventively.

"Maurice, have we any message for a Mr. Jones from—whom did you say, sir? Oh, yes. From Messrs. Smith & Smith?"

The second barman turned round and enveloped Tressider in a brief, searching glance.

"Oh, yes," he said. "Quite right, sir. Mr. Smith is expecting you. Will you step this way."

He led Tressider to the back of the room, where a stoutish, middle-aged man in a dark tweed suit was seated at a table eating an American sandwich.

"Mr. Jones, sir."

The stout man looked up, revealing small, chubby features beneath an enormous expanse of polished and dome-like skull. He smiled pleasantly.

"You are magnificently punctual," he said, in a clear, soft voice, with a fluting quality which made it very delightful to listen to. "I hardly expected you to get here quite so soon." And then, as the barman turned away, he added:

"Pray sit down, Mr. Tressider."

"You look a little unnerved," said Mr. Smith. "Perhaps you had a

rush from the station. Let me recommend one of Rapallo's special cocktails." He made a sign to the barman, who brought over two glasses filled with a curious, dark-coloured liqueur. "You will find it slightly bitter, but very effective. You need not be alarmed, by the way. Choose whichever glass you like and leave me the other. It is quite immaterial which."

Tressider, a little confounded by the smiling ease with which Mr. Smith read his thoughts, took one of the glasses at random. Mr. Smith immediately took the other and drank off one-half of the contents. Tressider sipped his. The liqueur was certainly bitter but not altogether unpleasant.

"It will do you good," said Mr. Smith, prosaically. "The boy, I take it, is quite well?" he went on, almost in the same breath.

"Perfectly well," said Tressider, staring.

"Of course. Your wife takes such good care of him, doesn't she? A thoroughly good and conscientious woman, as most women are, bless their dear hearts. The child is six years old, I think?"

"Rising six."

"Just so. A long time to go yet before he attains his majority. Fifteen years—yes, a considerable time, in which very many things may happen. You yourself, for instance, will be hard on sixty—the best part of your life at an end, while his is just beginning. He is a young gen-

tleman of great expectations, to quote the divine Dickens. And he is starting well, despite the sad handicap of losing both his parents at so early an age. A fine, healthy youngster, is he not? No measles? mumps? whooping-cough? that sort of thing?"

"Not so far," muttered Tressider.

"No. Your almost-parental care has shielded him from all the ills that youthful flesh is heir to. How wise your brother was, Mr. Tressider. Some people might have thought it foolish of him to leave Cyril in your sole guardianship, considering that there was only his little life between you and the Tressider estate. Foolish—and even inconsiderate. For, after all, it is a great responsibility, is it not? A child seems to hold its life by so frail a tenure. But your brother was a wise man, after all. Knowing your upright, virtuous wife and yourself so well, he did the best thing he could possibly have done for Cyril when he left him in your care. Eh?"

"Of course," said Tressider, thickly.

Mr. Smith finished his liqueur.

"You are not drinking," he protested.

"Look here," said Tressider, gulping down the remainder of his drink, "you seem to know a lot about me and my affairs."

"Oh, but that is common knowledge, surely. The doings of so rich and fortunate a little boy as Cyril

Tressider are chronicled in every newspaper paragraph. Perhaps the newspapers do not know quite so much about Mr. Tressider, his uncle and guardian. They may not realise quite how deeply he was involved in the Megatherium catastrophe, nor how much he has lost in one way and another on the turf. Still, they know, naturally, that he is an upright English gentleman and that both he and his wife are devoted to the boy."

Tressider leaned his elbow on the table and, holding his head propped on his hand, tried to read Mr. Smith's countenance. He found it difficult, for Mr. Smith and the room and everything about him seemed to advance and recede in the oddest manner. He thought he might be in for a dose of fever.

"Children . . ." Mr. Smith's voice fluted towards him from an enormous distance. "Accidents, naturally, will sometimes happen. No one can prevent it. Childish ailments may leave distressing after effects . . . babyish habits, however judiciously checked, may lead . . . Pardon me, I fear you are not feeling altogether the thing."

"I feel damned queer," said Tressider. "I—at the station today—hallucinations—I can't understand—"

Suddenly, from the pit in which it had lurked, chained and growling, Terror leapt at him. It shook his bones and cramped his stomach. It was like a palpable enemy, suffocating and tearing him. He

gripped the table. He saw Mr. Smith's huge face loom down upon him, immense, immeasurable.

"Dear, dear!" The voice boomed in his ear like a great silver bell. "You are really not well. Allow me. Just a sip of this."

He drank, and the Terror, defeated, withdrew from him. A vast peace surged over his brain. He laughed. Everything was jolly, jolly, jolly. He wanted to sing.

Mr. Smith beckoned to the barman.

"Is the car ready?" he asked.

Tressider stood by Mr. Smith's side. The car had gone, and they were alone before the tall green gates that towered into the summer twilight. Mile upon mile they had driven through town and country; mile upon mile, with the river rolling beside them and the scent of trees and water blown in upon the July breeze. They had been many hours upon the journey, and yet the soft dusk was hardly deeper than when they had set out. For them, as for Joshua, sun and stars had stood still in their courses. That this was so, Tressider knew, for he was not drunk or dreaming. His senses had never been more acute, his perceptions more vivid. Every leaf upon the tall poplars that shivered above the gates was vivid to him with a particular beauty of sound, shape and odour. The gates, which bore in great letters the name "SMITH & SMITH—REMOVALS,"

opened at Smith's touch. The long avenue of poplars stretched up to a squat grey house.

Many times in the weeks that followed, Tressider asked himself whether he had after all dreamed that strange adventure at the House of the Poplars. From the first whisper by the station bookstall to the journey by car down to his own home in Essex, every episode had had a nightmare quality. Yet surely, no nightmare had ever been so consecutive nor so clearly memorable in waking moments. There was the room with its pale grey walls and shining floor—a luminous pool in the soft mingling of electric light and dying daylight from the high, unshuttered windows. There were the four men—Mr. Smith, of the restaurant; Mr. Smyth, with his narrow yellow face disfigured by a scar like an acid burn; Mr. Smythe, square and sullen, with short, strong hands and hairy knuckles and Dr. Schmidt, the giggling man with the scanty red beard and steel-rimmed spectacles. And there was the girl with the slanting golden eyes like a cat's, he thought. They called her "Miss Smith," but her name should have been Melusine.

Nor could he have dreamed the conversation, which was business-like and brief.

"It has long been evident to us," said Mr. Smith, "that society is in need of a suitable organisation for the Removal of unnecessary per-

sons. Private and amateur attempts at Removal are so frequently attended with subsequent inconvenience and even danger to the Remover, who, in addition, usually has to carry out his work with very makeshift materials. It is our pleasure and privilege to attend to all the disagreeable details of such Removals for our clients at a moderate—I may say, a merely nominal—expense. Provided our terms are strictly adhered to, we can guarantee our clients against all unpleasant repercussions, preserving, of course, inviolable secrecy as to the whole transaction."

Dr. Schmidt sniggered faintly.

"In the matter of young Cyril Tressider, for example," went on Mr. Smith, "I can conceive nothing more unnecessary than the existence of this wearisome child. He is an orphan; his only relations are Mr. and Mrs. Tressider who, however amiably disposed they may feel towards the boy, are financially embarrassed by his presence in the world. If he were to be quietly Removed, who would be the loser? Not himself, since he would be spared the sins and troubles of life on this ill-regulated planet; not his relations, for he has none but his uncle and aunt who would be better for his disappearance; not his tenants and dependents, since his good uncle would be there to take his place. I suggest, Mr. Tressider, that the small sum of one thousand pounds would be profitably spent

in Removing this boy to that happy land 'far, far beyond the stars,' where he might play with the young-eyed cherubim (to quote our glorious poet), remote from the accidents of measles or stomach-ache to which, alas! all young children are so unhappily liable here below."

"A thousand?" said Tressider, and laughed, "I would give five, gladly, to be rid of the youngster."

Dr. Schmidt sniggered. "We should not like to be rapacious," he said. "No. One thousand pounds will amply repay the very trifling trouble."

"How about the risk?" said Tressider.

"We have abolished risk," replied Mr. Smith. "For us, and for our clients, the word does not exist. Tell me, the boy resides with you at your home in Essex? Yes. Is he a good little boy?"

"Decent enough kid, as far as that goes."

"No bad habits?"

"He's a bit of a liar, like lots of kids."

"How so, my friend?" asked Dr. Schmidt.

"He romances. Pretends he's had all kinds of adventures with giants and fairies and tigers and what not. You know the kind of thing. Doesn't seem to be able to tell the truth. It worries his aunt a good deal."

"Ah!" Dr. Schmidt seemed to take over the interview at this point. "Mrs. Tressider, she does not encourage the romancing?"

"No.. She does her best. Tells Cyril that he'll go to a bad place if he tells stories. But it's wonderful how the little beggar persists. Sometimes we have to spank him. But he's damnably obstinate. There's a bad streak in the boy somewhere. Unsound. Not English, that sort of thing."

"Sad," said Dr. Schmidt, sniggering, so that the word became a long bleat. "Sa-a-d. It would be a pity if the poor little boy should miss the golden gates after all. That would distress me."

"It would be still more distressing, Schmidt, that a person with a failing of that kind should be placed in any position of importance as the owner of the Tressider estates. Honour and uprightness, coupled with a healthy lack of imagination, have made this country what it is."

"True," said Schmidt. "How beautifully you put it, my dear Smith. No doubt, Mr. Tressider, your little ward finds much scope of imaginative adventure when playing about in the deserted grounds of Crantonbury Place, situated so conveniently next door to your abode."

"You seem to know a lot," said Tressider.

"Our organisation," explained Dr. Schmidt, with a wave of the hand. "It is melancholy to see the fine old country mansions thus deserted, but one man's loss is the gain of the little boy next door. I

should encourage little Cyril to play in the grounds of Crantonbury Hall. His little limbs will grow strong running about among the over-grown bushes and the straggling garden-beds where the strawberry grows underneath the nettle. I quote your Shakespeare, my dear Smith. It is a calamity that the fountains should be silent and the great fish-pond run dry. The nine men's morris is filled up with mud—Shakespeare again. Nevertheless, there are still many possibilities in an old garden."

He giggled and pulled at his thin beard.

If this fantastic conversation had never taken place, how was it that Tressider could remember every word so clearly. He remembered, too, signing a paper—the "Removal Order," Smith had called it—and a cheque for £1,000, payable to Smith & Smith, and post-dated October 1st.

"We like to allow a margin," said Mr. Smith. "We cannot at this moment predict to a day when the Removal will be carried out. But from now to October 1st should provide ample time. If you should change your mind before the Removal has taken place, you have only to leave word to that effect at Rappallo's. But *after* the Removal, it would be too late to make any alterations. Indeed, in such a case, there might be—er—unpleasantness of a kind which I should not care to specify.

But, between gentlemen, such a situation could not, naturally, arise. Are you likely to be absent from home at any time in the near future?"

Tressider shook his head.

"No? Forgive me, but I think you would be well advised to spend—let us say the month of September—abroad. Or perhaps in Scotland. There is salmon, there is trout, there is grouse, there is partridge—all agreeable creatures to kill."

Dr. Schmidt sniggered again.

"Just as you like, of course," went on Mr. Smith. "But if you and perhaps your wife also—"

"My wife wouldn't leave Cyril."

"Yourself, then. A holiday from domesticity is sometimes an excellent thing."

"I will think about it," said Tressider.

He had thought often about it. He also thought frequently about the blank counterfoil in his cheque-book. That, at least, was a fact. He was thinking about it in Scotland on September 15th, as he tramped across the moors, gun on shoulder. It might be a good thing to stop that cheque.

"Auntie Edith!"

"Yes, Cyril."

Mrs. Tressider was a thin woman with a strong, Puritan face; a woman of narrow but fixed affections and limited outlook.

"Auntie, I've had a wonderful adventure."

Mrs. Tressider pressed her pale lips together.

"Now, Cyril, think beforehand. Don't exaggerate, dear. You look very hot and excited."

"Yes, Auntie. I met a fairy—"

"Cyril!"

"No, *really*, Auntie, I did. She lives in Crantonbury Hall—in the old grotto. A real, live fairy. And she was all dressed in gold and lovely colours like a rainbow, red and green and blue and yellow and *all* sorts of colours. And a gold crown on her head and stars in her hair. And I wasn't a bit frightened, Auntie, and she said—"

"Cyril, dear—"

"Yes, Auntie, *really*. I'm not 'zaggerating. She was ever so beautiful. And she said I was a brave boy, just like Jack-and-the-Beanstalk, and I was to marry her when I grew up, and live in Fairyland. Only I'm not big enough yet. And she had lions and tigers and leopards all round her with gold collars and diamonds on them. And she took me into her fairy palace—"

"Cyril!"

"And we ate fairy fruit off gold plates and she's going to teach me the language of birds and give me a pair of seven-league boots all for myself, so that I can go *all* over the world and be a hero."

"That's a very exciting story you've made up, darling, but of course it's only a story, isn't it?"

"No, *'tisn't* only a story. It's quite true. You see if it isn't."

"Darling, there couldn't be lions and tigers and leopards at Crantonbury Hall."

"Well . . ." the child paused. "Well, p'r'aps I was 'zaggerating just a teeny, weeny bit. But there was two leopards."

"Oh, Cyril! Two leopards?"

"Yes, with golden collars and chains. And the fairy was ever so tall and beautiful, with lovely golden eyes just like the-leopards'. She said she was the fairy of the leopards, and they were fairies too, and after we'd had the fairy feast the leopards grew wings and she got on their backs—on one of them's backs I mean—and flew *right* away over the roof."

Mrs. Tressider sighed.

"I don't think Nannie ought to tell you so many fairy-tales. You know there aren't any fairies, really."

"That's all *you* know about it," said Cyril, rather rudely. "There is fairies, and I've seen one, and I'm to be the King of the Fairies when I'm bigger."

"You mustn't contradict me like that, Cyril. And it's *very* naughty to say what isn't true."

"But it *is* true, Auntie."

"You musn't say that, darling. I've told you ever so many times that it's very nice to make up stories, but we mustn't ever forget that it's all make-believe."

"But I *did* see the fairy."

"If you say that any more, Auntie will be very cross with you—"

"But I did, I did. I *swear* I did."

"Cyril!" Mrs. Tressider was definitely shocked. "That is a very wicked word to use. You must go straight to bed without your supper, and Auntie doesn't want to see you again till you have apologised for being so rude and telling such naughty stories."

"But, Auntie—"

"That will do," said Mrs. Tressider, and rang the bell. Cyril was led away in tears.

"If you please, ma'am," said Nannie, catching Mrs. Tressider as she rose from the dinner-table, "Master Cyril doesn't seem very well, ma'am. He says he has a bad stomach-ache."

Cyril did seem feverish and queer when his aunt went up to him. He was flushed and feverish, and his eyes were unnaturally bright and frightened. He complained of a dreadful pain under his pyjama-girdle.

"That's what happens to naughty boys who tell stories," said Mrs. Tressider, who had old-fashioned ideas about improving the occasion. "Now Nannie will have to give you some nasty medicine."

Nannie, advancing, armed with a horrid tumblerful of greeny-grey liquorice powder, had her own moral to draw.

"I expect you've been eating them nasty old crabapples out of the old

garden," she remarked. "I'm sure I've told you time and again, Master Cyril, to leave them things alone."

"I didn't eat nothing," said Cyril, "cept the fairy feast in the palace with the leopard lady."

"We don't want to hear about the leopard lady any more," said Mrs. Tressider. "Now, own up, darling, that was all imagination and nonsense, wasn't it? He does look feverish," she added in an aside to Nancy. "Perhaps we'd better send for Dr. Simmonds. With Mr. Tressider away, one feels rather anxious. Now, Cyril, drink up your medicine and say you're sorry. . . ."

When Dr. Simmonds arrived an hour later (for he had been out when summoned) he found his patient delirious and Mrs. Tressider thoroughly alarmed. Dr. Simmonds wasted no time with liquorice powder, but used the stomach-pump. His face was grave.

"What has he been eating?" he asked, and shook his head at Nannie's suggestion of green apples. Mrs. Tressider, white and anxious, went into details about the child's story of the leopard lady.

"He looked feverish when he came in," she said, "but I thought he was just excited with his make-believe games."

"Imaginative children are often unable to distinguish between fact and fancy," said the doctor. "I think he very probably did eat

something that he shouldn't have done; it would be all part of the game he was playing with himself."

"I made him confess in the end that he was making it all up," said Mrs. Tressider.

"H'm," said Dr. Simmonds. "Well, I don't think you'd better worry him about it any more. He's a highly-strung child, and he'll need all his strength—"

"You don't mean he's in danger, Doctor?"

"Oh, I hope not, I hope not. But children are rather kittle little cattle and something has upset him badly. Is Mr. Tressider at home?"

"Ought I to send for him?"

"It might be as well. By the way, could you let me have a clean bottle? I should like to take away some of the contents of the stomach for examination. Just to be on the safe side, you know. I don't want to alarm you—it's just that, in a case of this kind, it is as well to know what one has to deal with."

Before morning, Cyril was collapsed, blue in the face and cold, and another doctor had been called in. Tressider, when he hurriedly arrived by the midnight train, was greeted by the news that there was very little hope.

"I am afraid, Mr. Tressider, that the boy has managed to pick up something poisonous. We are having an analysis made. The symptoms are suggestive of poisoning

by solanine, or some alkali of that group. Nightshade—is there any garden nightshade at Crantonbury Hall?" Thus Dr. Pratt, a specialist and expensive.

Mr. Tressider did not know, but he said he thought they might go and see next day. The search-party was accordingly sent out in the morning. They discovered no nightshade, but Dr. Pratt, prowling about the weedgrown kitchen garden, made a discovery.

"Look!" he said. "These old potato-plants have got potato-apples on them. The potato belongs to the genus *Solanum*, and the apples, and sometimes even the tubers themselves, have occasionally given rise to poisonous symptoms. If the boy had happened to pluck and eat some of these berries—"

"He did, then," said Dr. Simmonds. "See here."

He lifted a plant on which a number of short stalks still remained to show where the potato-apples had been.

"I had no idea," said Tressider, "that the things were as poisonous as that."

"They are not as a rule," said Dr. Pratt. "But here and there one finds a plant which is particularly rich in the poisonous principle, solanine. There was a classical case, in 1885 or thereabouts—"

He prosed on. Mrs. Tressider could not bear it. She left them and went upstairs to sit by Cyril's bedside.

"I want to see the lovely leopard lady," said Cyril, faintly.

"Yes, yes—she's coming, darling," said Mrs. Tressider.

"With her leopards?"

"Yes, darling. And lions and tigers."

"Because I've got to be King of the Fairies when grow up."

"Of course you have, darling."

On the third day, Cyril died.

The expert's analysis confirmed Dr. Pratt's diagnosis. Seeds and skin of the potato-apple had been identified in the contents of the stomach. Death was from solanine poisoning, a remarkable quantity of the alkali having been present in the potato-apples. An examination of other berries taken from the same plants showed that the potatoes in question were, undoubtedly, particularly rich in solanine. Verdict: Death by misadventure. Children, said the coroner, were apt to chew and eat strange plants and berries, and the potato-apple undoubtedly had an attractive appearance—like a little green tomato—the jury had no doubt often seen it in their own gardens. It was, however, very seldom that the effects were so tragic as in the present sad case. No blame could possibly attach to Mr. and Mrs. Tressider, who had repeatedly warned the child not to eat anything he did not know the name of, and had usually found him an obedient child in this respect.

Tressider, to whom nobody had thought to mention the story of the leopard lady, showed a becoming grief at the death of his little ward. He purchased a handsome suit of black and ordered a new saloon car. In this he went about a good deal by himself in the days that followed the inquest, driving, on one occasion, as far as Greenwich.

He had looked up the address in the telephone-book and presently found himself rolling down a quiet riverside lane. Yes—there they were, on the right—two shabby green gates across which, in faded white lettering, ran the words:

SMITH & SMITH

REMOVALS

He got out of the car and stood, hesitating a little. The autumn had come early that year, and as he stood, a yellow poplar leaf, shaken from its hold by the wind, fluttered delicately to his feet.

He pushed at the gates, which opened slowly, with a rusty creaking. There was no avenue of poplars and no squat grey house with a pillared portico. An untidy yard met his gaze. At the back was a tumble-down warehouse, and on either side of the gate a sickly poplar whispered fretfully. A ruddy-faced man, engaged in harnessing a cart-horse to an open lorry, came forward to greet him.

"Could I speak to Mr. Smith?" asked Tressider.

"It's Mr. Benton you'll be want-

ing," replied the man. "There ain't no Mr. SMith."

"Oh!" said Tressider. "Then which of the gentlemen is it that has a very high, bald forehead—a rather stoutish gentleman. I thought—"

"Nobody like that here," said the man. "You've made a mistake, mister. There's only Mr. Benton—he's tall, with grey 'air and specs, and Mr. Tinworth, the young gentleman, him that's a bit lame. Was you wanting a Removal by any chance?"

"No, no," said Tressider, rather hastily. "I thought I knew Mr. Smith, that's all. Has he retired lately?"

"Lord, no." The man laughed heartily. "There ain't been a Mr. Smith here, not in donkey's years. Come to think of it, they're all dead, I believe. Jim! What's happened to old Mr. Smith and his brother. what used to run this show?"

A little elderly man came out of the warehouse, wiping his hands on his apron.

"Dead these ten years," he said. "What's up?"

"Gent here thought he knowed the parties."

"Well, they're dead," repeated Jim.

"Thank you," said Tressider.

He went back to the car. For the hundredth time he asked himself whether he should stop the cheque. The death of Cyril could only be a

coincidence. It was now or never, for this was the 30th September.

He vacillated, and put the matter off till next day. At ten o'clock in the morning he rang up the bank.

"A cheque"—he gave the number—"for £1,000, payable to Smith & Smith. Has it been cashed?"

"Yes, Mr. Tressider. Nine-thirty this morning. Hope there's nothing wrong about it."

"Nothing whatever, thanks. I just wanted to know."

Then he *had* drawn it. And somebody had cashed it.

Next day there was a letter. It was typewritten and bore no address of origin; only the printed heading SMITH & SMITH and the date, 1 October.

DEAR SIR,—

With reference to your esteemed order of the 12th July for a Removal from your residence in Essex, we trust that this commission has been carried out to your satisfaction. We beg to acknowledge your obliging favour of One Thousand Pounds (£1,000), and return herewith the Order of Removal which you were good enough to hand to us. Assuring you of our best attention at all times,

Faithfully yours,

SMITH & SMITH.

The enclosure ran as follows:

I, Arthur Tressider of (here followed his address in Essex) hereby confess that I murdered my ward and nephew, Cyril Tressider, in

the following manner. Knowing that the child was in the habit of playing in the garden of Crantonbury Hall, adjoining my own residence, and vacant for the last twelve months, I searched this garden carefully and discovered there a number of old potato-plants, some of them bearing potato-apples. Into these potato-apples I injected with a small syringe a powerful solution of the poisonous alkali solanine, of which a certain quantity is always present in these plants. I prepared this solution from plants of solanum which I had already secretly gathered. I had no difficulty in doing this, having paid some attention as a young man to the study of chemistry. I felt sure that the child would be tempted to eat these berries, but had he failed to do so I had various other schemes of a similar nature in reserve; on which I should have fallen back if

necessary. I committed this abominable crime in order to secure the Tressider estates, entailed upon me as next heir. I now make this confession, being troubled in my conscience.

ARTHUR TRESSIDER.

1 October, 193-

The sweat stood on Tressider's forehead.

"How did they know I had studied chemistry?"

He seemed to hear the sniggering voice of Dr. Schmidt: "Our organization—"

He burned the papers and went out without saying his customary farewell to his wife. It was not until some time later that he heard the story of the leopard lady, and he thought of Miss Smith, the girl with the yellow eyes like cat's eyes, who should have been called Melusine.



Anthony Boucher

Mystery for Christmas

No Queen paperback annual would be complete, it seems to us, without a Christmas story. And what could be more appealing than a Hollywood holiday story, featuring amateur sleuth Mr. Quilter and professional sleuth Mr. Smith, written by that most respected of mystery critics, Anthony Boucher, of "The New York Times" and our own EQMM . . .

THAT WAS WHY THE BENSON jewel robbery was solved—because Aram Melekian was too much for Mr. Quilter's temper.

His almost invisible eyebrows soared, and the scalp of his close-cropped head twitched angrily. "Dammel!" said Mr. Quilter, and in that mild and archaic oath there was more compressed fury than in paragraphs of uncensored profanity. "So you, sir, are the untrammelled creative artist, and I am a drudging, hampering hack!"

Aram Melekian tilted his hat a trifle more jauntily. "That's the size of it, brother. And if you hamper this untrammelled opus any more, Metropolis Pictures is going to be suing its youngest genius for breach of contract."

Mr. Quilter rose to his full lean height. "I've seen them come and go," he announced; "and there hasn't been a one of them, sir, who failed to learn something from me. What is so creative about pouring out the full vigor of your young

life? The creative task is mine, molding that vigor, shaping it to some end."

"Go play with your blue pencil," Melekian suggested. "I've got a dream coming on."

"Because I have never produced anything myself, you young men jeer at me. You never see that your successful screen plays are more my effort than your inspiration." Mr. Quilter's thin frame was aquiver.

"Then what do you need us for?"

"What—Damme, sir, what indeed? Hal!" said Mr. Quilter loudly. "I'll show you. I'll pick the first man off the street that has life and a story in him. What more do you contribute? And through me he'll turn out a job that will sell. If I do this, sir, then will you consent to the revisions I've asked of you?"

"Go lay an egg," said Aram Melekian. "And I've no doubt you will."

Mr. Quilter stalked out of the studio with high dreams. He saw the horny-handed son of toil out of

whom he had coaxed a masterpiece signing a contract with F.X. He saw a discomfited Armenian genius in the background busily devouring his own words. He saw himself freed of his own sense of frustration, proving at last that his was the significant part of writing.

He felt a bumping shock and the squealing of brakes. The next thing he saw was the asphalt paving.

Mr. Quilter rose to his feet undecided whether to curse the driver for knocking him down or bless him for stopping so miraculously short of danger. The young man in the brown suit was so disarmingly concerned that the latter choice was inevitable.

"I'm awfully sorry," the young man blurted. "Are you hurt? It's this bad wing of mine, I guess." His left arm was in a sling.

"Nothing at all, sir. My fault. I was preoccupied . . ."

They stood awkwardly for a moment, each striving for a phrase that was not mere politeness. Then they both spoke at once.

"You came out of that studio," the young man said. "Do you" (his tone was awed) "do you *work* there?"

And Mr. Quilter had spotted a sheaf of eight and a half by eleven paper protruding from the young man's pocket. "Are you a writer, sir? Is that a manuscript?"

The young man shuffled and came near blushing. "Naw. I'm not

a writer. I'm a policeman. But I'm going to be a writer. This is a story I was trying to tell about what happened to me— But are you a writer? In *there*?"

Mr. Quilter's eyes were aglow under their invisible brows. "I, sir," he announced proudly, "am what makes writers tick. Are you interested?"

He was also, he might have added, what makes *detectives* tick. But he did not know that yet.

The Christmas trees were lighting up in front yards and in windows as Officer Tom Smith turned his rickety Model A onto the side street where Mr. Quilter lived. Hollywood is full of these quiet streets, where ordinary people live and move and have their being, and are happy or unhappy as chance wills, but both in a normal and unspectacular way. This is really Hollywood—the Hollywood that patronizes the twenty-cent fourth-run houses and crowds the stores on the Boulevard on Dollar Day.

To Mr. Quilter, saturated at the studio with the other Hollywood, this was always a relief. Kids were playing ball in the evening sun, radios were tuning in to Amos and Andy, and from the small houses came either the smell of cooking or the clatter of dish-washing.

And the Christmas trees, he knew, had been decorated not for the benefit of the photographers from the fan magazines, but be-

cause the children liked them and they looked warm and friendly from the street.

"Gosh, Mr. Quilter," Tom Smith was saying, "this is sure a swell break for me. You know, I'm a good copper. But to be honest I don't know as I'm very bright. And that's why I want to write, because maybe that way I can train myself to be and then I won't be a plain patrolman all my life. And besides, this writing, it kind of itches-like inside you."

"*Cacoëthes scribendi*," observed Mr. Quilter, not unkindly. "You see, sir, you have hit, in your fumbling way, on one of the classic expressions for your condition."

"Now that's what I mean. You know what I mean even when I don't say it. Between us, Mr. Quilter . . ."

Mr. Quilter, his long thin legs outdistancing even the policeman's, led the way into his bungalow and on down the hall to a room which at first glance contained nothing but thousands of books. Mr. Quilter waved at them. "Here, sir, is assembled every helpful fact that mortal need know. But I cannot breathe life into these dry bones. Books are not written from books. But I can provide bones, and correctly articulated, for the life which you, sir— But here is a chair. And a reading lamp. Now, sir, let me hear your story."

Tom Smith shifted uncomfortably on the chair. "The trouble is,"

he confessed, "it hasn't got an ending."

Mr. Quilter beamed. "When I have heard it, I shall demonstrate to you, sir, the one ending it inevitably must have."

"I sure hope you will, because it's got to have and I promised her it would have and— You know Beverly Benson?"

"Why, yes. I entered the industry at the beginning of talkies. She was still somewhat in evidence. But why . . . ?"

"I was only a kid when she made *Sable Sin* and *Orchids at Breakfast* and all the rest, and I thought she was something pretty marvelous. There was a girl in our high school was supposed to look like her, and I used to think, 'Gee, if I could ever see the real Beverly Benson!' And last night I did."

"Hm. And this story, sir, is the result?"

"Yeah. And this too." He smiled wryly and indicated his wounded arm. "But I better read you the story." He paused and cleared his throat loudly. "*The Red and Green Mystery*," he declaimed. "By Arden Van Arden."

"A pseudonym, sir?"

"Well, I sort of thought . . . Tom Smith—that doesn't sound like a writer."

"Arden Van Arden, sir, doesn't really sound like anything. But please go on."

And Officer Tom Smith began his narrative:

THE RED AND GREEN MYSTERY

by ARDEN VAN ARDEN

It was a screwy party for the police to bust in on. Not that it was a raid or anything like that. God knows I've run into some bughouse parties that way, but I'm assigned to the jewelry squad now under Lieutenant Michaels, and when this call came in he took three other guys and me and we shot out to the big house in Laurel Canyon.

I wasn't paying much attention to where we were going and I wouldn't have known the place anyway, but I knew *her*, all right. She was standing in the doorway waiting for us. For just a minute it stumped me who she was, but then I knew. It was the eyes mostly. She'd changed a lot since *Sable Sin*, but you still couldn't miss the Beverly Benson eyes. The rest of her had got older (not older exactly either—you might maybe say richer) but the eyes were still the same. She had red hair. They didn't have technicolor when she was in pictures and I hadn't ever known what color her hair was. It struck me funny seeing her like that—the way I'd been nuts about her when I was a kid and not even knowing what color her hair was.

She had on a funny dress—a little-girl kind of thing with a short skirt with flounces, I guess you call them. It looked familiar, but I

couldn't make it. Not until I saw the mask that was lying in the hall, and then I knew. She was dressed like Minnie Mouse. It turned out later they all were—not like Minnie Mouse, but like all the characters in the cartoons. It was that kind of a party—a Disney Christmas party. There were studio drawings all over the walls, and there were little figures of extinct animals and winged ponies holding the lights on the Christmas tree.

She came right to the point. I could see Michaels liked that; some of these women throw a big act and it's an hour before you know what's been stolen. "It's my emeralds and rubies," she said. "They're gone. There are some other pieces missing too, but I don't so much care about them. The emeralds and the rubies are the important thing. You've got to find them."

"Necklaces?" Michaels asked.

"A necklace."

"Of emeralds *and* rubies?" Michaels knows his jewelry. His old man is in the business and tried to bring him up in it, but he joined the force. He knows a thing or two just the same, and his left eyebrow does tricks when he hears or sees something that isn't kosher. It was doing tricks now.

"I know that may sound strange, Lieutenant, but this is no time for discussing the esthetics of jewelry. It struck me once that it would be exciting to have red and green in one necklace, and I had it made.

They're perfectly cut and matched, and it could never be duplicated."

Michaels didn't look happy. "You could drape it on a Christmas tree," he said. But Beverly Benson's Christmas tree was a cold white with the little animals holding blue lights.

Those Benson eyes were generally lovely and melting. Now they flashed. "Lieutenant, I summoned you to find my jewelry, not to criticize my taste. If I wanted a cultural opinion, I should hardly consult the police."

"You could do worse," Michaels said. "Now tell us all about it."

She took us into the library. The other men Michaels sent off to guard the exits, even if there wasn't much chance of the thief still sticking around. The Lieutenant told me once, when we were off duty, "Tom," he said, "you're the most useful man in my detail. Some of the others can think, and some of them can act; but there's not a damned one of them can just stand there and look so much like the Law." He's a little guy himself and kind of on the smooth and dapper side; so he keeps me with him to back him up, just standing there.

There wasn't much to what she told us. Just that she was giving this Disney Christmas party, like I said, and it was going along fine. Then late in the evening, when almost everybody had gone home, they got to talking about jewelry. She didn't know who started the

talk that way, but there they were. And she told them about the emeralds and rubies.

"Then Fig—Philip Newton, you know—the photographer who does all those marvelous sand dunes and magnolia blossoms and things—" (her voice went all sort of tender when she mentioned him, and I could see Michaels taking it all in) "Fig said he didn't believe it. He felt the same way you do, Lieutenant, and I'm sure I can't see why. 'It's unworthy of you, darling,' he said. So I laughed and tried to tell him they were really beautiful—for they are, you know—and when he went on scoffing I said, 'All right, then, I'll show you.' So I went into the little dressing room where I keep my jewel box, and they weren't there. And that's all I know."

Then Michaels settled down to questions. When had she last seen the necklace? Was the lock forced? Had there been any prowlers around? What else was missing? And suchlike.

Beverly Benson answered impatiently, like she expected us to just go out there like that and grab the thief and say, "Here you are, lady." She had shown the necklace to another guest early in the party—he'd gone home long ago, but she gave us the name and address to check. No, the lock hadn't been forced. They hadn't seen anything suspicious, either. There were some small things missing, too—a couple

of diamond rings, a star sapphire pendant, a pair of pearl earrings—but those didn't worry her so much. It was the emerald and ruby necklace that she wanted.

That left eyebrow went to work while Michaels thought about what she'd said. "If the lock wasn't forced, that lets out a chance prowler. It was somebody who knew you, who'd had a chance to lift your key or take an impression of it. Where'd you keep it?"

"The key? In my handbag usually. Tonight it was in a box on my dressing table."

Michaels sort of groaned. "And women wonder why jewels get stolen! Smith, get Ferguson and have him go over the box for prints. In the meantime, Miss Benson, give me a list of all your guests tonight. We'll take up the servants later. I'm warning you now it's a ten-to-one chance you'll ever see your Christmas tree ornament again unless a fence sings; but we'll do what we can. Then I'll deliver my famous little lecture on safes, and we'll pray for the future."

When I'd seen Ferguson, I waited for Michaels in the room where the guests were. There were only five left, and I didn't know who they were yet. They'd all taken off their masks; but they still had on their cartoon costumes. It felt screwy to sit there among them and think: This is serious, this is a felony, and look at those bright funny costumes.

Donald Duck was sitting by himself, with one hand resting on his long-billed mask while the other made steady grabs for the cigarette box beside him. His face looked familiar; I thought maybe I'd seen him in bits.

Three of them sat in a group: Mickey Mouse, Snow White, and Dopey. Snow White looked about fourteen at first, and it took you a while to realize she was a woman and a swell one at that. She was a little brunette, slender and cool-looking—a simple real kind of person that didn't seem to belong in a Hollywood crowd. Mickey Mouse was a hefty blond guy about as tall as I am and built like a tackle that could hold any line; but his face didn't go with his body. It was shrewd-like, and what they call sensitive. Dopey looked just that—a nice guy and not too bright.

Then over in another corner was a Little Pig. I don't know do they have names, but this was the one that wears a sailor suit and plays the fiddle. He had bushy hair sticking out from under the sailor cap and long skilful-looking hands stretched in front of him. The fiddle was beside him, but he didn't touch it. He was passed out—dead to the world, close as I could judge.

He and Donald were silent, but the group of three talked a little.

"I guess it didn't work," Dopey said.

"You couldn't help that, Harvey." Snow White's voice was just

like I expected—not like Snow White's in the picture, but deep and smooth, like a stream that's running in the shade with moss on its banks. "Even an agent can't cast people."

"You're a swell guy, Madison," Mickey Mouse said. "You tried, and thanks. But if it's no go, hell, it's just no go. It's up to her."

"Miss Benson is surely more valuable to your career." The running stream was ice cold.

Now maybe I haven't got anything else that's make me a good detective, but I do have curiosity, and here's where I saw a way to satisfy it. I spoke to all of them and I said, "I'd better take down some information while we're waiting for the Lieutenant." I started on Donald Duck. "Name?"

"Daniel Wappingham." The voice was English. I could tell that much. I don't have such a good ear for stuff like that, but I thought maybe it wasn't the best English.

"Occupation?"

"Actor."

And I took down the address and the rest of it. Then I turned to the drunk and shook him. He woke up part way but he didn't hear what I was saying. He just threw his head back and said loudly, "Waltzes! Ha!" and went under again. His voice was guttural—some kind of German, I guessed. I let it go at that and went over to the three.

Dopey's name was Harvey Mad-

ison; occupation, actor's representative—tenpercenter to you. Mickey Mouse was Philip Newton; occupation, photographer. (That was the guy Beverly Benson mentioned, the one she sounded thataway about.) And Snow White was Jane Newton.

"Any relation?" I asked.

"Yes and no," she said, so soft I could hardly hear her.

"Mrs. Newton," Mickey Mouse stated, "was once my wife." And the silence was so strong you could taste it.

I got it then. The two of them sitting there, remembering all the little things of their life together, being close to each other and yet somehow held apart. And on Christmas, too, when you remember things. There was still something between them even if they didn't admit it themselves. But Beverly Benson seemed to have a piece of the man, and where did Dopey fit in?

It sort of worried me. They looked like swell people—people that belonged together. But it was my job to worry about the necklace and not about people's troubles. I was glad Michaels came in just then.

He was being polite at the moment, explaining to Beverly Benson how Ferguson hadn't got anywheres with the prints and how the jewels were probably miles away by now. "But we'll do what we can," he said. "We'll talk to these people and find out what's possible. I

doubt, however, if you'll ever see that necklace again. It was insured, of course, Miss Benson?"

"Of course. So were the other things, and with them I don't mind. But this necklace I couldn't conceivably duplicate, Lieutenant."

Just then Michael's eye lit on Donald Duck, and the eyebrow did tricks worth putting in a cartoon. "We'll take you one by one," he said. "You with the tail-feathers, we'll start with you. Come along, Smith."

Donald Duck grabbed a fresh cigarette, thought a minute, then reached out again for a handful. He whistled off key and followed us into the library.

"I gave all the material to your stooge here, Lieutenant," he began. "Name, Wappingham. Occupation, actor. Address——"

Michaels was getting so polite it had me bothered. "You won't mind, sir," he purred, "if I suggest a few corrections in your statement?"

Donald looked worried. "Don't you think I know my own name?"

"Possibly. But would you mind if I altered the statement to read: Name, Alfred Higgins. Occupation, jewel thief—conceivably reformed?"

The Duck wasn't so bad hit as you might have thought. He let out a pretty fair laugh and said, "So the fat's in the fire at last. But I'm glad you concede the possibility of my having reformed."

"The possibility, yes." Michaels underlined the word. "You admit you're Higgins?"

"Why not? You can't blame me for not telling you right off; it wouldn't look good when somebody had just been up to my old tricks. But now that you know—— And by the way, Lieutenant, just how do you know?"

"Some bright boy at Scotland Yard spotted you in an American picture. Sent your description and record out to us just in case you ever took up your career again."

"Considerate of him, wasn't it?"

But Michaels wasn't in a mood for bright chatter any longer. We got down to work. We stripped that duck costume off the actor and left him shivering while we went over it inch by inch. He didn't like it much.

At last Michaels let him get dressed again. "You came in your car?"

"Yes."

"You're going home in a taxi. We could hold you on suspicion, but I'd sooner play it this way."

"Now I understand," Donald said, "what they mean by the high-handed American police procedure." And he went back into the other room with us.

All the same that was a smart move of Michaels'. It meant that Wappingham-Higgins-Duck would either have to give up all hope of the jewels (he certainly didn't have them on him) or lead us straight

to them, because of course I knew a tail would follow that taxi and camp on his doorstep all next week if need be.

Donald Duck said goodnight to his hostess and nodded to the other guests. Then he picked up his mask.

"Just a minute," Michaels said. "Let's have a look at that."

"At this?" he asked innocent-like and backed toward the French window. Then he was standing there with an automatic in his hand. It was little but damned nasty-looking. I never thought what a good holster that long bill would make.

"Stay where you are, gentlemen," he said calmly. "I'm leaving undisturbed, if you don't mind."

The room was frozen still. Beverly Benson and Snow White let out little gasps of terror. The drunk was still dead to the world. The other two men looked at us and did nothing. It was Donald's round.

Or would've been if I hadn't played football in high school. It was a crazy chance, but I took it. I was the closest to him, only his eyes were on Michaels. It was a good flying tackle and it brought him to the ground in a heap consisting mostly of me. The mask smashed as we rolled over on it and I saw bright glitters pouring out.

Ferguson and O'Hara were there by now. One of them picked up his gun and the other snapped on the handcuffs. I got to my feet and turned to Michaels and Beverly Benson. They began to say things

both at once about what a swell thing I'd done and then I keeled over.

When I came to I was on a couch in a little dark room. I learned later it was the dressing room where the necklace had been stolen. Somebody was bathing my arm and sobbing.

I sort of half sat up and said, "Where am I?" I always thought it was just in stories people said that, but it was the first thing popped into my mind.

"You're all right," a cool voice told me. "It's only a flesh wound."

"And I didn't feel a thing. . . . You mean he winged me?"

"I guess that's what you call it. When I told the Lieutenant I was a nurse he said I could fix you up and they wouldn't need the ambulance. You're all right now." Her voice was shaky in the dark, but I knew it was Snow White.

"Well, anyways, that broke the case pretty quick."

"But it didn't." And she explained: Donald had been up to his old tricks, all right; but what he had hidden in his bill was the diamonds and the sapphire and the pearl earrings, only no emerald and ruby necklace. Beverly Benson was wild, and Michaels and our men were combing the house from top to bottom.

"There," she said. She finished the story and the bandaging at the same time. "Can you stand up all right now?"

I was still kind of punchy. Nothing else could excuse me for what I said next. But she was so sweet and tender and good I wanted to say something nice, so like a dumb jerk I up and said, "You'd make some man a grand wife."

That was what got her. She just went to pieces—dissolved, you might say. I'm not used to tears on the shoulder of my uniform, but what could I do? I didn't try to say anything—just patted her back and let her talk. And I learned all about it.

How she'd married Philip Newton back in '29 when he was a promising young architect and she was an heiress just out of finishing school. How the fortune she was heiress to went foey like all the others and her father took the quick way out. How the architect business went all to hell with no building going on and just when things were worst she had a baby. And then how Philip started drinking, and finally— Well, anyways, there it was.

They'd both pulled themselves together now. She was making enough as a nurse to keep the kid (she was too proud to take alimony), and Philip was doing fine in this arty photographic line he'd taken up. A Newton photograph was The Thing to Have in the smart Hollywood set. But they couldn't come together again, not while he was such a success. If she went to him, he'd think she was

begging; if he came to her, she'd think he was noble. And Beverly Benson had set her cap for him.

Then this agent Harvey Madison (that's Dopey), who had known them both when, decided to try and fix things. He brought Snow White to this party; neither of them knew the other would be here. And it was a party and it was Christmas, and some of their happiest memories were Christmases together. I guess that's pretty much true of everybody. So she felt everything all over again, only—

"You don't know what it's done for me to tell you this. Please don't feel hurt; but in that uniform and everything you don't seem quite like a person. I can talk and feel free. And this has been hurting me all night and I had to say it."

I wanted to take the two of them and knock their heads together; only first off I had to find that emerald and ruby necklace. It isn't my job to heal broken hearts. I was feeling O.K. now, so we went back to the others.

Only they weren't there. There wasn't anybody in the room but only the drunk. I guessed where Mickey and Dopey were: stripped and being searched.

"Who's that?" I asked Snow White.

She looked at the Little Pig. "Poor fellow. He's been going through torture tonight too. That's Bela Strauss."

"Bella's a woman's name."

"He's part Hungarian." (I guess that might explain anything.) "He comes from Vienna. They brought him out here to write music for pictures because his name is Strauss. But he's a very serious composer—you know, like . . ." and she said some tongue twisters that didn't mean anything to me. "They think because his name is Strauss he can write all sorts of pretty dance tunes, and they won't let him write anything else. It's made him all twisted and unhappy, and he drinks too much."

"I can see that." I walked over and shook him. The sailor cap fell off. He stirred and looked up at me. I think it was the uniform that got him. He sat up sharp and said something in I guess German. Then he thought around a while and found some words in English.

"Why are you here? Why the police?" It came out in little one-syllable lumps, like he had to hunt hard for each sound.

I told him. I tried to make it simple, but that wasn't easy. Snow White knew a little German, so she helped.

"Ach!" he sighed. "And I through it all slept!"

"That's one word for it," I said.

"But this thief of jewels—him I have seen."

It was a sweet job to get it out of him, but it boiled down to this: Where he passed out was on that same couch where they took me—

right in the dressing-room. He came to once when he heard somebody in there, and he saw the person take something out of a box. Something red and green.

"Who was it?"

"The face, you understand, I do not see it. But the costume, yes. I see that clear. It was Mikki Maus." It sounded funny to hear something as American as Mickey Mouse in an accent like that.

It took Snow White a couple of seconds to realize who wore the Mickey Mouse outfit. Then she said "Philip" and fainted.

Officer Tom Smith laid down his manuscript. "That's all, Mr. Quilter."

"All, sir?"

"When Michaels came in, I told him. He figured Newton must've got away with the necklace and then the English crook made his try later and got the other stuff. They didn't find the necklace anywhere; but he must've pulled a fast one and stashed it away some place. With direct evidence like that, what can you do? They're holding him."

"And you chose, sir, not to end your story on that note of finality?"

"I couldn't, Mr. Quilter. I . . . I like that girl who was Snow White. I want to see the two of them together again and I'd sooner he was innocent. And besides, when we were leaving, Beverly Benson caught me alone. She said, 'I can't talk to your Lieutenant. He is *not*

sympathetic. But you . . ." Tom Smith almost blushed. "So she went on about how certain she was that Newton was innocent and begged me to help her prove it. So I promised."

"Hm," said Mr. Quilter. "Your problem, sir, is simple. You have good human values there in your story. Now we must round them out properly. And the solution is simple. We have two women in love with the hero, one highly sympathetic and the other less so; for the spectacle of a *passée* actress pursuing a new celebrity is not a pleasant one. This less sympathetic woman, to please the audience, must redeem herself with a gesture of self-immolation to secure the hero's happiness with the heroine. Therefore, sir, let her confess to the robbery."

"Confess to the . . . But, Mr. Quilter, that makes a different story out of it. I'm trying to write as close as I can to what happened."

"Damme, sir, it's obvious. She did steal the necklace herself. She hasn't worked for years. She must need money. You mentioned insurance. The necklace was probably pawned long ago, and now she is trying to collect."

"But that won't work. It really was stolen. Somebody saw it earlier in the evening, and the search didn't locate it. And believe me, that squad knows how to search."

"Fiddle-faddle, sir." Mr. Quilter's close-cropped scalp was beginning

to twitch. "What was seen must have been a paste imitation. She could dissolve that readily in acid and dispose of it down the plumbing. And Wappingham's presence makes her plot doubly sure; she knew him for what he was, and invited him as a scapegoat."

Tom Smith squirmed. "I'd almost think you were right, Mr. Quilter. Only Bela Strauss did see Newton take the necklace."

Mr. Quilter laughed. "If that is all that perturbs you . . ." He rose to his feet. "Come with me, sir. One of my neighbors is a Viennese writer now acting as a reader in German for Metropolis. He is also new in this country; his cultural background is identical with Strauss's. Come. But first we must step down to the corner drugstore and purchase what I believe is termed a comic book."

Mr. Quilter, his eyes agleam, hardly apologized for their intrusion into the home of the Viennese writer. He simply pointed at a picture in the comic book and demanded, "Tell me, sir. What character is that?"

The bemused Viennese smiled. "Why, that is Mikki Maus."

Mr. Quilter's finger rested on a pert little drawing of Minnie.

Philip Newton sat in the cold jail cell, but he was oblivious of the cold. He was holding his wife's hands through the bars and she was saying, "I could come to you

now, dear, where I couldn't before. Then you might have thought it was just because you were successful, but now I can tell you how much I love you and need you—need you even when you're in disgrace."

They were kissing through the bars when Michaels came with the good news. "She's admitted it, all right. It was just the way. Smith reconstructed it. She'd destroyed the paste replica and was trying to use us to pull off an insurance frame. She cracked when we had Strauss point out a picture of what he called 'Mikki Maus.' So you're free again, Newton. How's that for a Christmas present?"

"I've got a better one, officer. We're getting married again."

"You wouldn't need a new wedding ring, would you?" Michaels asked with filial devotion. "Michaels, Fifth Street—fine stock."

Mr. Quilter laid down the final draft of Tom Smith's story, complete now with ending, and fixed the officer with a reproachful gaze. "You omitted, sir, the explanation of why such a misunderstanding should arise."

Tom Smith shifted uncomfortably. "I'm afraid, Mr. Quilter, I couldn't remember it straight."

"It is simple. The noun *Maus* in German is of feminine gender. Therefore a *Mikki Maus* is a female. The male, naturally, is a *Mikki Mäuserich*. I recall a delight-

ful Viennese song of some seasons ago, which we once employed as background music, wherein the singer declares that he and his beloved will be forever paired, '*wie die Mikki Mikki Mikki. Mikki Maus und der Mikki Mäuserich*.'"

"Gosh," said Tom Smith. "You know a lot of things."

Mr. Quilter beamed.

"We sure make a swell team as a detective."

The beam faded. "As a detective? Damme, sir, do you think I cared about your robbery? I simply explained the inevitable denouement to this story."

"But she didn't confess and make a gesture. Michaels had to prove it on her."

"All the better, sir. That makes her mysterious and deep. A Bette Davis role. I think we will try for a magazine sale on this. Studios are more impressed by matter already in print. Then I shall show it to F. X., and we shall watch the squirmings of that genius Aram Melekian."

Tom Smith looked out the window, frowning. They made a team, all right; but which way? He still itched to write, but the promotion Michaels had promised him sounded good, too. Were he and this strange lean old man a team for writing or for detection?

The friendly red and green lights of the neighborhood Christmas trees seemed an equally good omen either way.

Hugh Pentecost

The Talking Calf

Cattle rustling in New England and murder at a livestock auction—an unusual, interesting, and informative short novel by one of our most versatile detective writers . . .

IN HIS DREAM IT SEEMED TO GERARD that he heard Charlie crying out to him for help. The man with the hook had come for Charlie and was dragging him away. Gerard struggled with all his might to wake, and finally managed it, forcing himself up on his legs, and rubbing his eyes. Charlie, who had been sleeping with his head in Gerard's lap, was gone!

There were more than 500 calves in the pen at the cattle auction and all were milling restlessly about. Awake, Gerard could still hear Charlie's plaintive bleating. Gerard tried to wedge his way between the calves to the far side of the pen, but his ten-year-old strength was not enough. He finally fought his way to the railing and climbed up over the fence into the alleyway. At the end of the alley the wild-eyed cow was bellowing and kicking frantically at her stall gate. Charlie was somewhere in that direction.

It was almost dark, except for the low-watt electric bulbs around the walls of the building. Gerard realized he must have been asleep for two or three hours. Then Gerard

heard the scream close by, high, harsh, the very essence of terror.

Gerard froze for a moment. Then he started, fearfully, along the alley toward the sound of Charlie's wailing. Once more the scream rose, and was suddenly stilled. The wild-eyed cow redoubled her violent efforts to kick her way to freedom.

Gerard moved toward the corner of the calf pen and hesitated, half afraid to turn it. Suddenly he was caught from behind. An arm went round him, pinioning his own arms, and a calloused hand was clapped over his mouth. A hoarse whisper sounded in his ears:

"What did you see, kid? *What did you see?*"

Gerard hadn't seen anything until that moment, but now, unable to move his head, his bulging eyes were staring through the open slats into the stall of the wild-eyed cow. The animal was rearing up and pounding down with her front hoofs on a heap of what looked like rags lying in the shavings of her stall. The rags flopped to one side, and Gerald cried out behind

the muffling hand. It wasn't rags at all. It was an old man, in what had once been a neat blue suit, now torn and filthy. The silver hair was smeared with blood. Gerard closed his eyes as the murderous hoofs started straight down at the old man's white face. Then, mercifully, something struck Gerard on the back of the head and he heard and saw nothing more.

The next thing Gerard knew he was being shaken, violently. He opened his eyes. The man with a steel hook for a hand was bending over him.

"Okay, kid. Okay. That's better," the man said. "Now—what happened here? Did you see who did it? Come on, kid. Talk!"

The fog cleared from Gerard's head. He didn't look in the stall again where the old man lay. He didn't speak. He couldn't. He knew it would be useless. Who would believe him if he said he knew, because Charlie had told him, who had been there? People would laugh, because Charlie was, after all, just a 140-pound veal calf.

It had all begun with Charlie. They had bound his legs and stuffed them in a burlap bag to keep him from moving. Gerard had preferred this to tying Charlie in the back of the truck, because of the danger he might hang himself on the way to Sanders' place. Gerard rode in the back with Charlie, holding his head and stroking him

when he looked up at Gerard with his soft brown eyes and moaned. Gerard couldn't speak to him because the tears were hot behind his eyes and his throat muscles were tight from fighting back the sobs.

Once, when Charlie made a violent effort to free himself from the bonds, Gerard did find his voice.

"I'm going to try my very best to save you, Charlie," he said. "I promise you. I promise." And then the tears spilled down his face and tasted salty in his mouth.

Joe Lucas, the part-time hired man, sang as he drove the pick-up, and Gerard could hear him through the broken back window of the cab. Gerard had grown up with Joe's strange off-key whistling and singing. Joe had been helping Gerard's mother a couple of hours a day on the New England farm since Gerard's father had died, which was so long ago Gerard did not really remember him at all. Joe had been the only man in the setup until today. Today, at the age of ten, Gerard had, painfully, become a man, too.

The process had begun a few nights ago when, for some reason, Gerard hadn't been able to sleep. Lying in his upstairs bunk he'd heard his mother and Joe talking downstairs. His mother had been telling Joe that there was no money. She couldn't pay him. Worse than that, she said she didn't know how she was going to feed herself and Gerard until the stuff in the

truck garden was ready for market.

"There's the calf," Joe had said.

"No," Mrs. Richards said. "The calf is Gerard's. It's the only thing he's ever had that he really loves."

"Bring you seventy or eighty dollars at Sanders' Auction," Joe said.

"No," Mrs. Richards repeated. "We'll find some other way. The boy has little enough to give him pleasure."

Gerard had thought about it for two days. Then he approached Joe and told him he wanted to sell Charlie. He didn't want his mother to know till it was done, but he wanted to take Charlie to the auction and bring the money back to his mother.

Joe approved. "You're growing up, kid," he said. "Charlie'll bring a good price from the meat packers. He's a fine veal calf."

That was when Gerard's blood ran cold. He hadn't thought of anything but parting with Charlie; of Charlie's going to a bigger and better farm, where he'd really be happy.

"Couldn't we sell him as a dairy calf?" he asked Joe shakily.

"A bull calf with no papers is no use to a dairy farmer," Joe said. "You'll get ten or eleven dollars if you sell him dairy. A fat veal calf might bring eighty—even ninety dollars. Your ma needs the money, kid."

"If we could get just as much for him dairy it would be all right, wouldn't it, Joe?"

"You ask Lon Sanders when we get to the auction," Joe said. "You'll see."

For a few moments Gerard was tempted to give up the whole idea. He couldn't do that to Charlie. He'd seen Charlie born at the big Greer farm next door, and Paul Greer had said they had no use for a bull calf and had given him to Gerard. Paul Greer was everything Gerard hoped to be when he grew up. Could you sell a gift from your very best friend? He tried to argue with himself that you couldn't, but he knew, somehow, that Paul would no doubt approve of what he was doing.

So the day came, and Mrs. Richards went to the store, and Gerard and Joe and Charlie set out for Sanders' Livestock Auction. Gerard had never been to an auction and he'd always wanted to go, but the tragedy of Charlie took all the pleasure out of it.

"It's just around the bend up there," Joe called back through the broken window.

The truck slowed down, and Gerard found that they were in a long line of trucks, loaded with cows, horses, calves, crates of poultry, eggs, and produce. They slowed down to a snail's pace, moving ahead a few yards, stopping, moving ahead again. Finally they turned off the main highway and along a dirt drive, between two big barns. Beyond the barns Sanders' Livestock Auction came into full

view. There was a cluster of long, low, green-and-white buildings that covered more ground, Gerard guessed, than his mother's whole farm. In the yards were trucks—trucks and people.

There were more people than Gerard had ever seen except at the county fair. Men in blue jeans, men in bright-colored shirts, men in slick city clothes. Quite a number of them carried natural wood canes. There were women, too, worn-looking women, who looked as though work had been their only lot in life. They milled slowly around, talking to acquaintances, looking at the stock and produce as it came in on the trucks. There was a peddler's truck, the back end open, revealing shirts, jackets, gloves, shoes, rubber boots, fancy blankets, and robes. No one seemed interested in buying from the peddler at the moment, and he sat on a campstool by the tailboard, a gaunt, unshaven man who looked as though he carried the world on his shoulders.

The pick-up suddenly moved forward. Someone shouted at Joe, "Calves in the third dock, Joel!"

Joe whirled the truck to the right, stopped it, and backed in toward the low green-and-white buildings. Men unfastened the tailboard of the truck and two of them came aboard.

"Hi, sonny," one of them said. He was a big, iron-gray man in blue coveralls. He reached down

and, with a steel hook, slashed open the burlap bag that covered Charlie's legs. When he straightened up Gerard saw, with horror, that the hook was something the man had in place of a hand. A jackknife blade flashed, and the ropes were cut from Charlie's legs. Charlie staggered uncertainly onto his feet, and leaned against Gerard.

A man stood beside the truck with a sheaf of papers in his hand. "Name of owner?" he asked in a flat, nasal voice.

"Mrs. Sarah Richards, Wakeville," Joe said. He'd come around from the front of the cab.

"Veal or dairy?" the man asked.

"Veal," Joe said.

"Just a minute, please!" Gerard didn't recognize his own voice.

"Number 582," the man said.

The man with the hook had a long iron tool in his real hand. He leaned forward and the tool touched Charlie's left ear. There was a snapping sound, and Charlie bleated. A metal tag—Number 582—had been fastened to the ear with a metal staple.

The man with the hook raised his knee and kicked Charlie in the stomach. "Get going," he said. "Yipee!"

Charlie staggered down off the truck onto the dock. Another man with a cane whacked him over the rump with it.

"Veal!" shouted the man with the hook.

Whack went the cane on Char-

lie's rump, and Charlie moved off down a narrow alleyway.

"Just a minute, please!" Gerard wailed.

The man with the hook turned to him with a tobacco-stained smile. "What is it, sonny?"

"I—I was supposed to talk to Mr. Sanders before we decided whether Charlie was dairy or v-veal," Gerard said.

"Charlie?" the man asked.

"My calf, sir."

"Oh, he's veal, all right," the man said.

"Where could I find Mr. Sanders?" Gerard asked.

"He's around somewhere," the man with the hook said. "Okay, Joe. Get that jalopy out of there."

"But where is Mr. Sanders?" Gerard asked, his voice breaking.

"Better get out of here, sonny. You'll get hurt," the man with the hook said. "Skedaddle!"

Gerard looked around him, helplessly. Charlie had disappeared into the depths of the building. Joe was gone with the truck. Gerard was alone, and once more he couldn't check the tears.

To say that Lon Sanders was a big man was to make an understatement. He stood well over six feet and he was monstrously fat. Three smoothly shaven chins billowed down over the white collar of his shirt. His waistcoat covered a mountain of stomach, and the gold watch chain that spread across

it looked heavy enough for a logging operation. His eyes, a strange pale blue, were sunk in deep sockets. He always wore a neat city suit, covered by a filthy raincoat, and his feet were encased, summer and winter, in manure-splattered rubber galoshes.

He stood by one of the hog pens in the green-and-white building, looking down at a black sow. A thin, rheumy-eyed farmer leaned on the top rail of the pen beside him.

"How heavy do you think she'll go, Lon?" the farmer asked.

Lon Sanders tugged at a lower lip as flexible as a rubber doll's. "Oh, I don't know, George. Three seventy-five, I'd say."

The farmer's face fell. "I'd've sure thought she'd come closer to four hundred."

"Maybe. Maybe so, George. I hope so for your sake. I hope she'll come closer to four-fifty. But I'd say, three seventy-five. A nice hog. A real nice hog. Hope she brings you plenty."

Sanders moved his huge bulk along between the pens toward the sales ring. He carried a cane, like so many of the others, a cane with a pointed metal ferrule on the end of it, and he poked at imaginary objects with it as he walked.

Just before he reached the sales ring an elderly man in a neat blue serge suit came toward him from the other direction. "See you a minute alone, Lon?" he asked.

"Why, sure, Mr. Greer."

Dave Greer lowered his voice. "They got fourteen head of Black Angus off the Watson farm in Brookdale last night," he said.

Sanders' eyes had the hooded look of a gambler's who's used to working under bright lights. "Fourteen!" he said.

"Backed a truck right up to the lower meadow and carted them off," Greer said.

"It gets me how nobody ever sees or recognizes these trucks," Sanders said. "They must be from out of state. Nobody'd dare use local trucks."

"No," Greer said. There was something about his tone that made Lon Sanders shift his pale eyes.

"How do you mean, Dave?"

"I was agreeing with you," Greer said. "That's over four hundred head of cattle have been stolen in this area in the last two months. Lord knows how many hundred more in other parts of New England."

"Probably a thousand head in all," Sanders said.

"I've given up on the State Police," Greer said. "I'm going to use my own methods for catching up with these people!"

Sanders' pale blue eyes moved again. "What kind of methods?"

Dave Greer shook his head and indicated something behind Lon. The huge bulk of the auctioneer turned and he looked down at a small, red-eyed boy.

"Want to get by, son?" Lon asked. "I do kind of fill up this here alleyway."

"Why, it's Sarah Richards' boy, isn't it?" Dave Greer asked.

"Yes, sir," Gerard said. "Could you tell me where I could find Mr. Sanders, Mr. Greer?"

"This is Mr. Sanders, Gerard."

"Something I can do for you, Mr. Richards?" Lon asked gravely.

"It's about my calf, sir," Gerard said. "Charlie." He looked at Greer. "The one Paul gave me, sir."

"Oh, yes," Greer said. "He would be about ready now. A nice bull calf."

"It's a question of whether we can get more for him as a dairy calf or veal calf, sir," Gerard said, looking anxiously up at Lon.

"A bull-calf, you say?" Lon's voice was deep and judicial.

"Yes, sir."

"He'll bring twice as much and more as a veal calf, Mr. Richards." Gerard's face quivered. The pale blue eyes stared down at him thoughtfully. "This your first sale, Mr. Richards?"

"Yes, sir."

"I know how you feel," Lon said. "Remember the first time I sold a veal calf. Remember it very well. But after you've run your own farm a while, Mr. Richards, well—you'll find it's all in the day's work. If you want a good price—definitely veal."

Gerard's lips trembled. "Thank you, sir," he said.

The inside sales ring of Sanders' Livestock Auction looked a little bit like a small sporting club. The ring itself was a half-circle. Across the diameter was the raised auctioneer's counter, flanked on one side by the exit chute and on the other by the entrance into a fenced pen which was actually the large scales upon which the entering animal is weighed for all to see before it is brought into the ring. Rising around the perimeter of the circle were the spectators' seats, banked in bleaker rows rising two stories high inside the building. To the right of the seats was the office, presided over by the cashier and his clerks and bookkeepers. It was here that the buyers made their payments and received their consignment slips which permitted them to pick up their purchases.

Mac Sperry, a dried-up little man, had been Lon Sanders' cashier for years. He sat behind the window, sucking on a dry straw, and nodding without warmth to the hundreds of people who came his way. There was nothing about Mac to notice until he started counting money. Then his agile fingers would flick off a stack of greasy bills with the speed of an expert card mechanic. Mac could tell you today's market price, yesterday's market price, and the price on any given day over the past fifteen years.

Gerard, feeling entirely helpless, had turned away from Lon and old

Dave Greer, not knowing what to do or where to go. He had seen Mac sitting behind the window, and there was nothing of warmth or sympathy there to help him. He was about to turn away when he saw Paul Greer.

Paul was tall and gracefully thin. His movements were quick but controlled, like a good athlete's. He was good-looking, in a regular-featured way, and his tousled blond hair made him look younger than his twenty-five years. He seemed to be lost in thoughts of his own, because he didn't even see Gerard until the boy spoke. Then he stopped.

"Oh, hello, Gerard. Come to see the fun?"

Gerard tried to steady his voice: "It's about Charlie, Paul."

"Charlie?"

"My—my calf."

"Oh. Selling him?" Paul asked.

"We—we have to."

"Ought to bring a good price by now," Paul said. He patted Gerard's shoulder. "Be seeing you," he said. He walked away, leaving Gerard with a feeling of complete desertion. Paul went on into the office.

"Hi," Mac Sperry said.

"Hi," Paul said. It was an automatic response. He was looking past Mac at a girl who sat behind a desk at the rear of the office.

"You hear Hal Watson lost fourteen head of Black Angus last night?" Mac asked.

"I heard." Paul was still looking at the girl, who seemed suddenly busy with the papers on her desk.

"Cops don't seem to be getting anywhere with this racket," Mac said. "Most likely in on it themselves," he added cynically.

"Most likely," Paul said, almost as if he hadn't heard. He walked past Mac toward the rear.

Esther Mulloy saw him coming. She was an uncommonly pretty girl, without affectations. Her job was to enter the figures from the auctioneer's clerk's sheets onto the company books. Her job didn't begin until the sales actually started in the ring.

Paul stopped by her desk and stood looking down at her. "I'm sorry about last night," he said.

"It's all right, Paul."

"I meant to call you, but I didn't have a chance."

"It's all right."

"Esther—"

"Yes, Paul?"

"I—I wish I could explain."

"When you're ready," she said steadily.

A door slammed behind them, so loudly that Paul turned. A dark-haired young man wearing blue jeans, a dark blue shirt, leather jacket, and a battered felt hat had come into the office. He walked straight back toward Paul and Esther, his eyes blazing. He ignored Paul.

"Where were you last night, Esther?" he demanded.

The girl's lips tightened into a straight line. "I'm afraid that isn't any concern of yours, Hal," she said.

Hal Watson dropped his cigarette on the floor and crushed it out under his heel. "I'm past being jealous," he said. "This is more important than that."

"It's still none of your business," Esther said.

Hal Watson turned on Paul, whose face had gone chalky white. "Are you claiming you were with her?" he demanded.

Paul's fists were clenched at his side. "I'm not claiming anything," he said in a low voice.

Watson turned back to Esther. "Were you with him?"

"It's still none of your business, Hal," she said.

Watson leaned forward, as though Paul wasn't there. "Stay clear of this, Esther."

"Stay clear of what?"

"It doesn't matter how I feel. I guess you know. I'm not a good loser. I hate his hide. But I wouldn't be out to get him, just on that account."

"Wouldn't you, Hal?"

"Okay—you think I'm that kind of a heel. But I don't want you hurt." Watson faced Paul. "I've had my eye on you, Paul, for a long time. Your old man has a lot of influence in this neck of the woods. The police wouldn't dream of looking in your direction. But I would!"

Paul just stood there, pale, silent.

Watson turned back to Esther: "I want you out from under, Esther, when the roof falls in. They took me last night. Fourteen head! Well, I've had my eye on Paul for a long time, and now I'm going to get him!" He faced Paul again, waiting for an answer. When he didn't get one he turned and walked out of the office.

"Paul!" Esther said. "You didn't even answer him. He was accusing you!"

Paul looked at her, misery in his blue eyes. Then he, too, turned and walked away without a word.

Number 582 was a long way from the top of the list, and Gerard, his throat still aching from the constriction of the muscles, knew what he must do. He must spend whatever time there was left with Charlie. He began a kind of half-frightened search, through the labyrinth of alleyways between stalls and pens, to locate the place where the veal calves waited their turn to go on the block. He found it, after wandering through the horse sheds, the pens for beef cattle, the hog pens, because of Charlie's plaintive wailing. Gerard knew that sound as well as he knew his own mother's voice. Several hundred other calves were bawling, but Charlie's special bleat of greeting was distinctive—at least, to Gerard.

The veal-calf pen was at the very farthest end of the string of build-

ings and sheds. Just opposite it was a series of box stalls, or single pens. The very last one in the row contained a wild-eyed cow, which was trying with a kind of methodical fury to kick down the rails of the pen. Gerard walked warily past this stall to where Charlie, as if by a sure knowledge of the need for self-preservation, had got just as far to the rear of the pen as he could. Gerard reached his hands through to Charlie, and Charlie licked them with his tongue, rough as sandpaper. Gerard felt as though his heart would burst. It was as though Charlie knew what was coming and was pleading with him.

Gerard climbed over the fencing and into the pen. He had often sat with Charlie in his stall at home. Now they were surrounded by hundreds of other churning, frightened animals. Gerard wedged his back against the corner made by the wall and the fencing. Then he slid down into a sitting position on the soft shavings.

Charlie nuzzled him, and then knelt down on his uncertain front legs. Finally he plopped all the way down and let Gerard stroke his hard forehead.

Somewhere in the distance Gerard heard a sound, vaguely familiar. It was like that of the tobacco auctioneers on the radio. Lon Sanders had begun his grueling day's work of selling hundreds of items, one by one. It had a strange lulling, soothing sound, even

though it spelled the approach of tragedy. The truth was, Gerard had not slept the night before from worrying about Charlie. Now Charlie lay quite still and Gerard put his head down on Charlie's shoulder, and presently he slept.

That was when he dreamed the dream about the man with the hook taking Charlie away. That was when he woke, and climbed the fence, and was seized from behind, and saw old Mr. Greer being viciously trampled by the wild-eyed cow . . .

The air in the sales ring was fetid with the smells of stale tobacco, sweating animals, wet wool from the clothes of those who had come in out of a late afternoon rain, and disinfectant required by law in the surrounding pens. Three hours had gone by since Lon Sanders, along with his clerk, had taken their places behind the auctioneer's counter. The deep, rumbling voice had gone on continuously for that time—except for one or two brief breaks when Lon was called outside—disposing of poultry, eggs, farm machinery, harnesses, blankets, and wagons. It had continued on with the sale of beef cattle, and went on now toward the end of the sale of horses. Beef cattle, horses, and veal calves went before the animals consigned for dairy sale because the buyers were different. Packing houses bought the first three items.

It was toward the very last of the horses that the ring man led in a heavy-legged work horse with great white globes for eyes. The animal was clearly blind.

"This one doesn't look so good," Lon Sanders said dryly. "In fact, he doesn't look good at all."

There was a murmur of appreciation for the witticism from the crowd in the seats.

"Who'll start this horse?" Lon droned. "There's still work in him. Work single or double. Got to be sound in wind and limb. Who'll start this horse? Do I hear forty? Do I hear forty?" He looked around. "He's got to go, boys. Let's see his mouth, Ed!"

The ring man pushed back the horse's heavy lips, revealing his teeth.

"He's got a fairly decent tooth, boys. A real decent tooth. Who'll start him? Do I hear forty? Do I hear forty?"

"Twenty dollars!"

Lon looked wounded. "Twenty dollars!" The sound of doom crept into his voice. "There's good news tonight! The price of hamburger's coming down." Then the monotonous babble started. "So I have twenty dollars—who'll give me twenty-one? I have twenty, who'll give me twenty-one? Twenty-twenty-one? Twenty-twenty-one? He's poor but honest, boys. Do I hear twenty-one? I have twenty, want twenty-one. Twenty, want twenty-one."

The man with the hook walked in through the exit chute and went over to the counter. He stretched upward to whisper something to Lon, who stopped his cry for the moment. The ring man led the blind horse slowly around the ring. Suddenly Lon straightened up and brought his gavel down hard.

"Sold—to Ned Brown for twenty dollars!" He raised his huge bulk. "Ed, take over for me when you get rid of that piece of prime sirloin! Sorry, folks, but when you gotta go, you gotta go," Sanders said.

He climbed down from behind the counter and followed the man with the hook out through the chute, slapping at the side of his leg with the natural wood cane.

As soon as they were out of sight of the crowd Hook Jaeger turned to the auctioneer: "It's pretty bad, boss. He's ground to a pulp."

"What was he doing in the pen with that animal? Dave Greer wasn't here to buy."

"Got me, boss."

From down the alley came the frightened bellowing of a steer.

"How'd you happen to find him?" Lon asked.

"That cow Millbanks brought in. We had trouble unloading her and we stuck her off by herself. She's been raisin' Cain ever since she got here, gettin' the calves riled up. I went back to see if I couldn't quiet her down, and found him in with her."

"You left him in there?" Lon asked.

Jaeger stopped and faced the auctioneer. He scratched his cheek with the steel hook. "The cow didn't kill him, boss." He pointed to the iron-ferruled cane in Sanders' hand. "One of them, jammed several inches in between his shoulder blades, and broke off."

Lon's face didn't change expression by a hair. "Maybe he fell on it."

"Maybe," Hook said.

Lon pushed past him. "Nobody else around?"

"Only a kid," Hook said. "The Richards boy. Came in with a calf and was hangin' around the calf pen. He heard the old man scream, he says. But he didn't see anything."

"We'll have to keep this quiet till the cops get here or we'll have a riot."

Lon moved with remarkable speed for his bulk down the last hundred feet of alley to the cow pen. He saw Gerard cowering against the far wall at the end of the alley, but he didn't stop. In the pen the cow had backed away from the remains of Dave Greer, her head lowered, snorting and pawing at the shavings. Lon reached for the catch on the pen door.

"Don't go in there with her alone, boss," Hook warned.

Lon didn't answer. He swung the pen door wide and stepped in. The frenzied cow bellowed loud

and reared up on her hind legs.

Lon raised his massive right arm and struck the animal a slashing blow over the nose with the crooked end of his cane. It seemed to take every ounce of fight out of the animal.

"Run her into the pen with the other beef animals," Lon said. He walked around and slapped the cow on the rump with his bare hand. Meekly, the cow ambled out into the alley. Lon knelt down beside Dave Greer's crumpled body. If there was a piece of cane stuck in the man's back he couldn't see it, because old Mr. Greer lay on his back, staring with one sightless eye at the whitewashed ceiling. The other eye had been obliterated by the pounding hoofs. Lon knelt there without touching the body.

"So you had methods of your own, Dave," he muttered. "Too bad you didn't get to tell me about 'em." He lurched upward onto his feet and walked out into the alley.

Hook came back after having disposed of the cow. "Doctor?" he asked.

"Are you kidding?" Lon said. "Get Mac to call the trooper barracks and tell 'em there's been an accident. And keep your mouth shut, Hook. The sale has to go on, you know. We don't want all the buyers out here gawkin'."

"You're the boss," Hook said, and started away.

"And, Hook! Paul Greer. Send him in here."

Lon fumbled in the pocket of his old raincoat and produced a package of gum. He unwrapped a stick, carefully, and put it in his mouth. Then he turned, like an engine in a roundhouse, and faced Gerard, who all this time had remained silent, flattened against the far wall at the end of the alley.

"Mind if I have a word with you, Mr. Richards?"

It was as though being spoken to released Gerard from some kind of spell. He came forward and stood in front of Lon, his eyes lowered.

"You must have had a pretty bad time, Mr. Richards," Lon said.

The small hands were knotted into fists, and the thin shoulders shook.

"I understand you were back here keepin' that animal of yours company," Lon said. Gerard nodded.

"You hear or see anything?"

"I—I heard him scream—twice," Gerard whispered.

"But you didn't see nothin'?" the big man persisted.

Gerard looked up at the pale blue eyes. "I didn't see anything, sir," he said. "Not till the man with the hook came and f-found Mr. Greer."

"That's all you saw, Mr. Richards?"

"I s-saw the cow—t-trampling him, sir."

Lon's jaws moved on the stick of gum as he looked thoughtfully at the boy. There was no chance to

talk further because excited voices sounded at the far end of the alley. Lon turned, and saw Paul Greer running toward them, followed by Joe Lucas and Hook.

Everyone knew about Paul Greer. He wasn't really a Greer at all. Old Dave and his wife had never had any children. It was one of those tragedies that seem most often to happen to people who really want kids. Paul had been adopted when he was a small boy, and he'd been the apple of old Dave Greer's eye. So much so, people said, that old Dave didn't notice that Paul wasn't much like a Greer.

Paul had had every chance: gone to school and to agricultural college. Some day the big Greer farm would be his. But Paul was wild, people said; liked the girls. He'd be out till all hours, which is no way for a farmer. Old Dave didn't know what went on with Paul, they said, especially of late. Dave didn't know, they said, that Paul was drinking a lot and that his company wasn't of the best. He was even giving Esther Mulloy a hard time; a fellow should see more of the girl he's going to marry, and not stand her up on dates or take her to places a fellow wouldn't take a nice, decent girl. It was too bad, they said, that she couldn't see the good in Hal Watson, a fellow more her kind.

Paul brushed past Lon now and went into the pen without saying a word. Just inside the gate he

stopped and stared down at his foster-father's body. Then, suddenly, he turned away, rested his arm on the top rail of the pen, and buried his face against it. The others watched him, silent, expectant. At last he lifted his head and faced them.

"Why have you left him there?" he asked. His voice was harsh and unsteady.

"We've sent for the troopers, son," Lon said.

"Does he have to lie there in shavings and manure?" Paul demanded.

"The cow didn't kill him, son. Hook saw a piece of a cane rammed in his back and broke off. We figured he shouldn't be touched till the troopers get here."

"You can cover him, can't you?" Paul said.

Lon made a gesture to Hook, who went off in search of a blanket. No one spoke again. Joe Lucas stared down at the body, whistling, off-key, between his teeth. Joe never was much for talk. He was dark, loose-jointed, laconic. People said he'd been good to the widow Richards, giving her a lot of free time when he could have been making overtime on his truck-driving job for Lon.

Joe seemed, suddenly, to become aware of Gerard. He walked over to him, and knelt down in front of him.

"You saw it happen, kid?" he asked.

Gerard shook his head. "I heard it, but I didn't see anything, Joe."

"What did you hear, kid?"

"I heard him scream. I—I was back in there with Charlie."

"But you didn't see anyone around?"

"I didn't see anyone. I didn't see anyone at all, Joe."

Joe stood up. "Your mother'll have my hide for letting you in for this. Not that I could help it."

Hook came back down the alley with a red plaid carriage robe. He started into the pen with it, but Paul took it away from him and gently covered the body.

"I'll stay with him till the troopers come," he said to Lon.

"I guess we'll all stay, son," Lon said. "Hook, you kind of hang around the end of the runway and see we don't collect a crowd."

"You're the boss," Hook said again, and went away.

"I'd kind of like to get the kid out of here," Joe Lucas said. "It's no place for him."

Lon tugged at his lower lip. "I guess you could take him outside somewhere," he said. "Only, he's a kind of a witness, Joe. The troopers'll want to talk to him. So don't take him far."

"I'd rather stay here, sir."

Lon looked down and saw Gerard standing very close to him, a pleading look in his eyes. "It's not going to be pleasant, Mr. Richards."

"I'd rather stay here, sir."

"It's no place for you, kid," Joe

said. "You come with me. Your mother'll have my hide if I let you stay here."

"Please, sir!" Gerard said to Lon.

Lon scowled down at him. "I tell you what, Mr. Richards. You go out for a stroll around with Joe, and then as soon as the troopers get here they'll be wanting you back. Probably ten minutes or so."

"Run along, Gerard," Paul Greer said.

Joe Lucas took Gerard's arm and led him away. Lon watched them go from under his heavy, hooded lids. Then he turned to Paul Greer. "Wanted to talk to you alone, son, while I had a chance," he said.

Paul's face twisted with a spasm of pain. "I was just talking to him. Not half an hour ago!"

"I was talkin' to him, too, earlier," Lon said. "We were talkin' about these truck rustlers. They got Hal Watson last night—fourteen head."

"Oh?" Paul said.

"Dave said he was tired of the way the troopers were handling things," Lon said. "He told me he was goin' to use his own methods. Got any idea what they were, Paul?"

"No," Paul said, looking down at the toes of his heavy boots.

"He must have talked to you, son."

"No."

Lon chewed his gum for a moment, his big fingers fiddling with the watch chain across his stom-

ach. "I figured maybe he was gettin' on the trail of someone," he said slowly. "No use pretendin', Paul. He was murdered. You know any other reason why somebody'd be out to get him? He was liked around here, well liked."

"No."

"Look, son, I'm your friend. I was Dave's friend. No reason to clam up on me."

Paul looked straight at him. "If I had the answers, Lon, I'd give them to you. I don't know who killed him or why. I wish I did."

"Maybe we can give 'em to you," a voice said, from behind Lon.

The big man turned, and found Hal Watson and Mac Sperry, the cashier, standing there. Watson's eyes were dark with anger.

"He wishes he had the answers!" Watson said. "That's a laugh. Tell 'em, Mac. If I do, they'll say I'm gunning for him on account of Esther."

Mac Sperry chewed on the dry straw in the corner of his mouth.

"What are you doin' away from your window, Mac?" Lon asked.

"Esther's took over," Mac said. "I figured we ought to tell you what we heard. Hook phoned the troopers from the office; that's how I knew what'd happened."

"What's that got to do with Paul here?"

"'Bout an hour ago," Mac said, "I was helping load the poultry crates, like I always do. Met Hal out there, and we started back to-

wards the office together. Talking about his cattle that was stolen last night. We was just by the Number Four dock when we heard a couple of guys arguin'." Mac took the straw out of his mouth and pointed it at Paul. "Him and old Dave."

"You couldn't help hearing them," Hal said.

Lon's pale blue eyes shifted to Paul, who stood there, staring down at his boots. "Were you arguin' with Dave, Paul?"

"What can he say?" Watson said. "We both heard them."

"Old Dave said he was through with him," Mac said. "Somethin' about he'd given him everything and this was how he got paid back."

"How?" Lon asked.

"Didn't say," Mac said. "Paul give as good as he was gettin', and with interest. He told the old man to lay off or he'd let him have it, even if he was an old man."

"He wasn't that delicate," Watson said. "He told him he'd kill him if he didn't lay off!"

"That right, Mac?" Lon asked quietly.

"I guess it is," Mac said. "Course he was mad. I don't say as he meant it. You know how it is when you're mad."

"Look in that pen and you'll see how it is!" Watson said. "There've been rumors about Paul for a long time—the kind of people he was hanging out with. He couldn't wait for the old man to die. He wanted

money now. Ask him where he was last night when my cattle were stolen. Check back with him on the other thefts. I'll bet my life that's what he and the old man were talking about. Old Dave had caught up with this louse. He would have turned him in."

Paul Greer didn't face his accusers. "Would you expect me to admit he's telling the truth?" he asked. "And if I told you he's lying, would you believe me?"

Watson moved forward so that there was no way for Paul to avoid him. "You've been coming to these auctions ever since we were kids, Paul. You and I both. When you were ten years old the old man gave you a cane, like all the traders carry. For fifteen years you've carried that cane every Tuesday afternoon of your life. I saw you had it earlier today. Where is it now? You're not carrying your cane now!"

Paul looked down at his hands as though surprised to find the cane wasn't there.

"I'll tell you where it is!" Watson said. "It's broken off in the old man's heart! That's where it is."

Paul's punch started from way back, but it never reached its mark. Lon's left hand grabbed his arm before it could land. The strength of his grip must have been enormous to stay the momentum of the swing.

"Now we'll get to the bottom of this nice and peaceful, Paul," he said. "Nice and peaceful."

Gerard's hand was a small ice cube reposing in Joe Lucas's firm grip, and Gerard's heart pounded against his ribs as they emerged from the end of the alley and stepped out onto the deserted loading docks. It was almost dark outside, and floodlights, fixed on the building and circling the yard, illuminated the hundreds of parked trucks. In the background the substitute auctioneer was rattling on a high-pitched tenor in contrast to Lon's rich baritone. He had just started the first lot of veal calves.

Just across the yard Gerard saw that the peddler was doing a brisk business in bright-colored shirts and weatherproof jackets. The rain had stopped, but there were still puddles on the ground, reflecting the light from the floods.

"Let's take a walk around, kid," Joe said.

"No! Please, Joe!" Gerard said. Joe looked at him. "What's the matter with you, kid? We'll take a look at things. It will take your mind off—that back there."

"I'd rather stay here, Joe."

"What ails you?" Joe sounded exasperated.

What ailed Gerard was pure, unadulterated, stomach-burning fear. Because Gerard knew who had killed old Dave Greer: the man who had grabbed him from behind, and whispered to him, "What did you see, kid? What did you see?" That same man had struck him, flat-handed, alongside the head and

knocked him on his face in the shavings, so that Gerard had only heard the sound of his escaping footsteps and hadn't seen him. But Gerard knew who it was. Charlie had told him. Charlie had told him just as surely as if he had been able, like a person, to speak the man's name.

Charlie had that special bleat of greeting. For months Gerard had heard it every time he approached the shed where Charlie was kept back home. He always had it for Gerard and for his mother, and for the one other person who ever cared for him—Joe Lucas. When Gerard had waked from his sleep in the calf pen, Charlie had been gone, but Gerard had heard him saying hello to someone. Charlie would never have left Gerard except to greet a friend, and the only other friend he had in this terrible place was Joe Lucas!

"Let's walk around," Joe said, tugging at Gerard's hand.

Gerard knew what would happen. Joe would take him out behind the trucks, out into some dark recess of the yard, and there make sure that he never told anyone what only he and Charlie knew. Joe had never been so thoughtful of him before. Usually he was telling Gerard not to bother him and to get out of his way and not to ask so many questions. Now he was being kind and thoughtful; and Gerard knew that it was a fraud.

"Couldn't we go in and watch

the auction, Joe?" Gerard asked.

"They're starting the veal calves," Joe said. "You don't want to watch that, do you? You don't want to see them sell Charlie, do you?"

They would sell Charlie, the only other witness, and then Joe would take care of him, Gerard told himself, and no one would ever know who'd killed old Dave Greer. Gerard's mind raced over a dozen impossible methods of escape and then lit on a simple one.

"I have to go to the bathroom," he told Joe.

The rest rooms were built in sheds at one end of the row of green-and-white buildings. Joe didn't seem to suspect. He took Gerard over to the sheds and told him he'd wait outside for him. Gerard went in with only one thought in mind. There had to be a back way out! He would get away and hide somewhere until Lon Sanders or the troopers found out it was Joe and arrested him.

Gerard couldn't tell them, he knew. They wouldn't believe him when he said that Charlie had told him. They'd let Joe go free until they found some other evidence, and Joe would surely take that chance to kill him. Gerard knew he could expect no help from anyone. They wouldn't believe him until it was too late.

Escape from the rest room turned out to be unexpectedly simple. There was an exit at the back into the main buildings. Gerard

stepped through the door and found himself very near the sales ring. He saw the rows of people seated around the ring, saw Esther Mulloy's anxious face behind the glass of the cashier's window. He saw a calf come into the pen that was really the great scales, and saw the big, black needle registering his weight.

"I got three hundred of these veal calves to sell," the assistant auctioneer announced, "and I don't aim to take over an hour doin' it. So liven up out there, men!" Then he began the meaningless babble of the calling.

Gerard had no time to waste. He looked around, and saw that there was a narrow opening to one side of the rows of seats, just about wide enough for him to squeeze through. No one was paying any attention to him; they were watching the calf in the ring. Gerard wedged his way through the opening and found himself in a large space under the seats. It was littered with trash: cigarette butts, candy wrappers, pop bottles. In one corner was a stack of mildewed feed bags. Gerard headed for these, burrowed his way under them, and pulled a sour-smelling piece of bur-lap over his head.

The sounds of the auction went on around him.

Sergeant Finney, of the State Troopers, waited at the gate to the pen, tapping a cigarette on the back

of his hand, as the doctor finished his examination of Dave Greer's body. Finally the doctor rose, dusting off his hands.

"Nothing more I can do here," he said. "Can't make a definite report without an autopsy, but I'll say this—if the cane was in him before he was trampled on, it killed him. But the trampling would have killed him, too. Broke darn' near every bone in his body."

"Why would anyone jab the cane in him afterwards?" Finney asked.

"That's your department," the doctor said. "Get the body down to the undertaking parlor and I'll let you know in a couple of hours for sure. Right now I'd say he was murdered by the cane being rammed clean through his heart. . . . Be seeing you, Sergeant." The Doctor nodded to Lon, chewing on his cud of gum, to Paul and Hal Watson and Mac Sperry, and went off, carrying his little black bag.

Finney turned to Lon. "How do you figure it, Lon?" he asked.

The auctioneer drew a long, wheezing breath. "Got to figure it by things you know, Finney. I knew Dave Greer. He wasn't no spring chicken any more, but he'd never of turned his back on any man who was lookin' for trouble. Whoever skewered him with that cane, sneaked up on him. Otherwise, Dave would have got it in front. That's the kind of man he was."

"So he was killed and dragged in

here so it'd look like a trampling," Finney said.

"With that cane in his back?"

"It broke off. Maybe the murderer figured on pulling it out after he got in the pen. Maybe that crazy cow scared him off, or maybe he heard someone coming."

"Maybe," Lon said.

"You don't go along with it?" the trooper asked.

"I figure it happened right here," Lon said. "The boy heard him scream. Heard him scream twice. I figure that was when he got it from behind. Then the killer pushed him into the pen with the cow. The cane broke off in the wound and he didn't have any time to pull out the piece that was left in."

"What boy?"

"The Richards kid," Hal Watson said.

"He's around when you want to talk to him," Lon said. "Claims he didn't see anything. But he heard Dave scream. He was over there in the veal-calf pen with an animal he'd brought in."

"What would Greer be doing back here?" the trooper asked.

Lon shrugged. "It's a public place, Finney."

"I'll tell you what he was doing here," Watson said. "He and Paul were having their argument in the Number Four dock. That's right at the end of this alley. Dave walked away from Paul—just trying to get away from him. Paul followed him down here and let him have it."

"Got anything to say about that, Paul?" Finney asked.

Paul Greer just shook his head.

"One thing, Lon," Finney said.

"Most of the canes these fellows carry have no tips on 'em, or rubber tips. I notice yours has an iron ferule. It would have to be one like that you could use as a weapon. What's the idea of a sharp point?"

"I bought half a dozen of 'em, oh, fifteen years ago," Lon said.

"They was made for mountain climbing. Caught my fancy. Turned out to be handy, winter-times. Lot of snow and ice around pastures where you go to look at animals."

"And it was one of those canes Dave Greer gave Paul," Watson said.

"Your cane has one of those iron points?" Finney asked Paul.

"You've heard from the star witness for the prosecution," Paul said.

Lon nodded slowly. "No use arguin' that one, son," he said. "I gave one of them canes to Dave, and I remember he passed it on to you."

"Where is it?" Finney asked.

"I don't know," Paul said.

"He had it earlier this afternoon, Watson said.

"How about it, Paul?"

"I had it," Paul said. "But I don't know where it is now. I must have put it down somewhere."

Lon slapped his own cane against his leg. "Couldn't tell one

of those canes from another," he said, "unless a fellow cut his initials into it."

"Is yours marked, Paul?" Finney asked.

"No," Paul said.

"Tryin' to remember where they all went," Lon said. "There's mine and Paul's. Gave one to a horse dealer over in Kent—fellow's out in North Dakota now. There's one hung around the office a while and somebody snitched it. Never saw it again."

"That was over eight years ago," Mac Sperry said.

"Recollect I gave the other two to dealers from out of state. One of 'em's dead; the other I haven't seen for years."

"So there were yours and Paul's," Finney said.

Lon smiled faintly. He held up his stick. "And which one would you say this is?"

"What're you trying to confuse things for, Lon?" Watson demanded.

"I just ain't a conclusion-jumper, Hal, that's all," Lon said. "Could you swear this isn't Paul's cane?"

"No-o," Watson said. "But you could. I bet it hasn't been out of your hand all day. Never saw you without it."

"Might not be a bad idea to go after facts instead of guesses," Lon said. "I think Dave was killed by someone he'd caught up with in this cattle-rustling business."

"And I say that was Paul," Wat-

son said. "I can produce evidence to show that—"

"And I think," Lon interrupted smoothly, "that Richards kid knows something he isn't telling. Didn't act natural. Maybe he's thought it over now and will do a little talking."

"You think he saw something, Lon?" Mac Sperry asked.

"I think he was holding something back—I don't know what. You better get back on the job, Mac. With Paul here in trouble, I've got a hunch Esther's figures might be kind of haphazard."

Sergeant Finney was not a brilliant man, but he was an honest, thorough police officer. In the small towns he covered from the barracks he was more than instrument of the law. If you were a man in his position you got to know people. You took the drunks home instead of arresting them. You listened to the hard-luck stories, almost like a priest. You used your judgment, except where infractions of the law were clear. Reckless driving was something you tried to cure before you punished it. You got to be a real part of the community. Finney was liked, and he had been respected 100 per cent until this cattle stealing had begun a few months back.

It had broken out like a rash. From the evidence of tire tracks and cut wires it was clear that trucks backed up to the pastures in

the dead of night and took the cattle. There were never more taken than could be managed in one truckload, but the plague was persistent. Ten here tonight; a dozen fifty miles away tomorrow night; fifteen at the opposite end of the county the next night. The trouble was not limited to Sergeant Finney's jurisdiction alone. It was going on all over New England, and parts of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Consultations with other State Police officials had brought about the conviction that there was some kind of syndicate at the head of this modern rustling.

Roads were patrolled, but with limited forces it seemed the thieves always avoided the area where the patrols were in operation. A careful check of all-night diners, the hang-outs of truck drivers on the road, revealed nothing. No strange trucks had appeared at separated places which in any way checked with the thefts. Road-blocks at unexpected locations had produced no results.

Farmers had begun to offer violent protests to the higher-ups in the Trooper barracks. Some groups of farmers had banded together to hire private investigators. Local sheriffs had organized posses to patrol the countryside. The men would be out for nights on end, and then gradually, as nothing happened, the force would dwindle. At just that moment the thieves would strike again.

Old Dave Greer had been one of the leaders among the farmers who had decided to take matters into their own hands. Dave had been fair enough.

"I know what you're up against, Finney," he'd say. "I know you're trying your best. But maybe we can find our own ways."

Time had gone by, and only a week ago Finney had seen Dave, and Dave had seemed optimistic. "I think we've got a lead," he said. "I wouldn't be surprised if something breaks pretty soon. When it does, we'll want you in on it, Finney. Need the law on our side. Be waiting to hear from me."

So Finney had heard from him—dead, stabbed in the back, his body trampled almost out of recognition. One thing Sergeant Finney was certain of: Lon was right. Old Dave had been killed because he was on the trail of the cattle thieves.

Finney took Paul Greer into the office back of the salesroom. It was the only place you could shut yourself away from people. Business had to go on at the window, but Mac Sperry and Esther Mulloy were handling that, Mac counting his endless stacks of bills. Finney took over Esther's desk at the back of the office where he could see everyone who might come in. He sat Paul down with his back to Esther and Mac.

"Cigarette?" Finney held out his pack.

"No, thanks," Paul said.

Finney lit one and leaned back in the chair. "Small towns aren't like any other place, Paul. You get to hear everything. It would knock your eye out if you could see the stack of complaints that come into our office—busybodies trying to get the law to interfere in private goings-on. Yes, sir, we get to hear everything."

Paul stared down at his boots in silence.

"You've been on the outs with Dave, lately," Finney said. "I've heard it in a dozen places. What was the trouble?"

"There was no trouble," Paul said.

"Then you weren't quarreling with him this afternoon?"

"No."

"Then what was it Mac and Hal Watson heard?"

"We were having an argument. We weren't quarreling."

Finney sighed. "You've been seen in a lot of strange places lately, Paul. Eating places out of town—bars, juke-box joints. You never used to go out that way."

"Is there a law against it?"

Finney shook his head. "I thought I knew you, Paul. I figured you for a steady, hard-working, progressive young farmer. I figured you and Esther'd get married; settle down, and take over old Dave's place. Lately—well, I don't know."

"My life is my own as long as I don't break the law, isn't it?"

"That's where we're at now, Paul," Finney said. "Was that your cane that was used to kill Dave?"

Paul looked straight at him. "I don't know. I don't know where my cane is. But I didn't use it to kill him, Finney."

"You didn't follow him from the dock down to the veal-calf pen?"

"No."

"Where did you go, Paul?"

"Out in the yard. I didn't go any place in particular."

"What was the argument about?"

Paul's lips tightened. "It was private and personal."

"About Esther?"

Paul was silent.

"I've heard Dave was upset over the way you've been treating Esther lately," Finney waited, but Paul didn't speak. "Okay, Paul; if you don't want to help yourself, I can't help you. For the time being you can figure yourself under arrest."

"On what charge?" Paul asked sharply.

Finney smiled at him. "Holding you as a material witness," he said. "Up to now you're the last person we know who saw old Dave alive. You can stay here in this office if you like. But don't take it into your head to take a powder on me. It would be just the same as a confession, Paul."

Joe Lucas ran into Lon Sanders just inside the Number Four dock. "Darn kid ran out on me," he said.

"Went to the rest room, and came back into the buildings here. I don't know where he's got to."

Lon frowned thoughtfully. "Like to find him, Joe. I've got a hunch he knows more than he told us."

"You think so?" Joe looked away from the pale blue eyes.

"If he does, it isn't exactly the safest thing for him to be running around loose."

"Safe?" Joe sounded startled.

"Somebody might want to shut him up," Lon said. "Let's circulate."

"Probably gone back to that calf of his," Joe said.

"Let's see."

Lon led the way back down the alley to the calf pen. The ring men were bringing them out now, one by one, to the sales rink and there was a great deal of stirring and confusion. Lon stood by the rail, looking in among the animals.

"Don't see him no place," he said.

One calf let out a particularly loud bleat and came over to where Lon and Joe stood. He stuck his nose through the rail and pushed at Joe. Joe rubbed his head, absently. "Charlie hasn't gone in yet," he said. "The kid would be with him if he was here."

"That the calf?" Lon asked.

"Yeah."

"Can you read the number on that ear clip?"

"Five eighty-two."

"Well, let's find the boy," Lon said.

They walked down to the end of the alley, where Hook Jaeger still stood guard. "You haven't seen the Richards boy anywhere, have you, Hook?"

"He came out of the rest room a little while ago," Hook said. "Went in toward the sales ring."

"Probably got himself a box seat to see the calf sold," Lon said.

He and Joe walked in to the edge of the ring and looked up at the rows of seats. Gerard wasn't there. Lon spoke to one of the handlers standing by, and was answered with a shrug.

"I don't like it," Lon said.

He walked over to the office window and spoke to Mac and Esther, who were inside. Neither of them had seen the boy.

"Probably outside somewhere," Mac said.

Just then Hal Watson joined them. His lips tightened when he heard about the missing boy. His dark eyes moved to the back of the office where Paul Greer sat alone.

"Well, what are we standing around for?" Watson said. "Let's find him."

"Lend us a hand, Mac," Lon said.

"You take over, Esther."

The four men crossed over to the end of the buildings.

"There's four rows of pens and stalls in these buildings," Lon said. "Let's each take a row and work from one end to the other. You take the outside, Mac. I'll take the

next. You next, Joe, and then Watson."

"He's probably in the yard," Mac said, "listening to somebody's car radio."

Ten minutes later they met at the far end of the buildings. They had not found Gerard. Lon made no comment, but he stood for a long time, his chins sunk forward on his chest, thinking. "Probably scared," he muttered to no one in particular, "and hiding. Where would he hide? Some place small. Some place dark."

"Back of a truck," Watson suggested. "Maybe his own truck. Where is it, Joe?"

They went out into the yard, but Gerard wasn't in the Richards' pickup. They looked around, a little staggered at the prospect of searching two hundred and fifty trucks. Watson, as if driven by some internal urge, moved on to the one that was parked next to the Richards truck, and then to the next, a bright-red new pick-up.

"Lon!" Watson's voice was sharp and excited.

Lon walked over.

Watson was holding half of a cane—the crooked end—in his hand. His eyes glittered in the half darkness. "Look what I found here," he said.

Lon stared at the broken half of the cane. "Got any idea whose truck it is?" he asked.

Mac Sperry scuffed at the dirt with his shoe. "It's Paul Greer's," he

said. "Just got it a week or ten days ago."

Lon's pale eyes were fixed, expressionlessly, on Watson. "Right handy for your cause, Hal, to find it in Paul's truck."

"You accusing me of framing him?" Watson blazed. "The next thing you'll be saying I stole my own cattle as a cover-up!"

"An interesting speculation, Hal," Lon said. He sighed. "Well, we better find Finney."

In the cashier's office Esther worked at the window, accepting money from buyers and filling out their consignment slips. Two clerks working at desks behind her made the permanent records of the sales. Paul Greer sat alone at the far end of the room.

From her window Esther saw a consignment of a dozen calves brought into the ring to be sold in one lot. She knew this would take several minutes, and she asked one of the clerks to take her place at the window and went back to where Paul was sitting. He looked up at her, misery in his eyes.

"Why don't you tell them?" Esther asked quietly.

He looked startled. "Tell them what?"

She sat down on the edge of the desk, close enough so that her hand could rest on his shoulder. "I'm a peculiar type girl," she said. "I waited a long time to fall in love. I couldn't make a mistake."

"Apparently you have," Paul said, without looking up.

"To coin a phrase—tell it to the Marines," Esther said.

"Do you have to have a blueprint?" Paul asked.

There was an old, wise look on Esther's young face. "You've stood me up eight times, by actual count, in the last month. You seem to have taken to drink. I hear your friends aren't above reproach. I don't believe what any of it seems to mean."

"Esther!"

"I know you, Paul. I know you've had a reason for behaving as you have. I know how you really felt about Mr. Greer. If you were heard quarreling with him, I think it was a fake."

Paul looked up at her, a kind of wonder in his eyes.

"I love you, darling," Esther said. "I know you. You don't have to tell me what it's all about if you don't want to. You see, I figured out long ago what you were up to."

"Esther!" he said, his voice low.

"Can't you tell Finney the truth?" Esther asked.

"I can never prove it, now."

"Why not?"

"Because Dad was the only other person who knew it."

"And I wouldn't be a good witness for you, would I?"

"Esther, I love you," Paul said quietly. "When I get untangled from this we won't wait. We won't wait at all."

"Any time, any place, mister."

The clerk at the window called Esther. She hesitated a second, rumpling Paul's hair with her fingers. Then she went back to her job. Paul reached for his cigarettes, and his eyes were very bright as he watched Esther at the window. Then they clouded over as the office door opened and Sergeant Finney came in. The trooper walked straight back to the desk and stood in front of Paul, his jaw set.

"What have you done with the boy?" Finney asked.

"What boy?"

"Stop stalling, Paul. Where's Gerard Richards?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," Paul said. "The last I saw him Joe Lucas had him in tow."

"He ran away from Joe. You must have caught up with him."

"What do you mean—caught up with him?"

"We found your cane, Paul."

"Oh? Where was it?" Paul asked casually.

"The half of it that isn't in old Dave's back was in your pick-up," Finney told him.

Slowly, Paul rose to his feet. "What are you trying to pull off here, Finney?"

"Where's that boy?" the trooper demanded.

"Why don't you use your head?" Paul said, his voice rising. "He went out with Joe. You saw him go. I was with you. You brought me back here to question me, and I haven't left this office since."

Finney was silent, frowning. He was going back over it in his mind. Unless Paul had left the office in the last twenty minutes or so . . .

"Esther might lie for me," Paul said, "but not the other clerks. Ask them, why don't you?"

"Okay," Finney said. "Okay."

"Why would I want to harm the boy? I've always been fond of him," Paul said.

"The boy saw you kill Dave," Finney said.

"What!"

"You *were* close to the boy," Finney said. "I remember. He used to follow you around like a puppy."

"So what?"

"We had it figured wrong, that's all," Finney said. "We thought he was scared to talk, afraid someone might hurt him. It was because it was you—he didn't want to incriminate you. That's why he kept his mouth shut."

"Listen to me—just once!" Paul said. "I didn't kill Dad. Gerard didn't see me, because I wasn't here. Gerard isn't protecting me. If he did see something he may very well be in danger."

"I guess not," Finney said. "You and Dave quarreled, Paul, and you threatened him. Right,"

"I was heard, so I guess there's no use denying it," Paul said.

"It was your cane and we found the broken half in your truck. Sooner or later the kid will talk. Meanwhile, I'm taking you to the barracks."

"Still a material witness?"

"The charge is murder," Finney said.

"What are you going to do about finding the kid?"

"He'll turn up," Finney said. "Let's go."

The trooper took Paul's arm and started him for the office door. Just as they reached it Lon Sanders wedged his bulk through it.

"I'm sorry it turned out this way, Paul," he said. "I'm real sorry."

Paul reached out and his fingers closed on the auctioneer's arm. "Lon! Don't stop looking for that boy," he said urgently. "Finney's making a fool of himself when he thinks Gerard's protecting me. If he saw something or knows something he's in trouble."

A small frown creased Lon Sanders' forehead. "I'd hate to think that, Paul."

"Well, *think* it! I don't care whether you believe me or not."

"You know how the kid idolized Paul," Finney said. "It's pretty clear the reason he was holding back was to protect Paul."

"It could be," Lon said thoughtfully. "I guess he'll turn up, all right."

Paul looked at Lon and saw the frown smooth out. Lon was satisfied. Paul moved, and it was lightning-fast. For an instant Lon was between him and Finney. In that instant he flung open the door and charged out through it.

"Paul!"

Finney reached for his holstered gun, and found Esther clinging to his gun arm.

"Are you out of your mind?" she cried. "Where can he go?"

"Sorry you did that, Esther," Finney said, shaking himself free. "It's aiding and abetting." Finney went racing out after Paul, blowing his whistle to summon his partner, who was out on the grounds.

Lon Sanders didn't move, not even when Esther tugged at his arm.

"Esther, get me the trucking records for the last month," he said, in a distant voice. "And the clippings on the cattle thefts."

"Lon! Are you just going to stand here? That crazy Finney may shoot Paul. Paul didn't kill Mr. Greer!"

"Do what I say, honey," Lon said gently. "I can't help Paul by runnin' after Finney. Can't run a lick."

A calf staggered blindly down the alley and into the scale pen that was to the left of the sales ring. The pen door slammed behind him. The needle on the big, white face of the scales went to 140 pounds.

"Veal calf, Number 582," the assistant auctioneer droned. "Weight, one forty. Okay boys, let him out."

The ring-end of the pen was opened and the calf half trotted, half stumbled out into the ring.

He opened his mouth and wailed.

Under the rows of seats Gerard pulled the mildewed bag off the top of his head. He would have known Charlie's voice anywhere. Peering out toward the ring, between the legs of people in the seats, he saw Charlie flouncing around the ring, while the auctioneer began his call. This was it. This was the end for Charlie.

Gerard crept forward until he could stare out between a pair of blue-jeaned legs. Charlie was so frightened. You could see it in his wide brown eyes and hear it in his constant bleating.

"I got sixty, who'll give me sixty-one? I got sixty, sixty-one; sixty, sixty-one. *And* I got sixty-one, who'll give me sixty-two? Sixty-two? I got sixty-two; sixty-three? Sixty-two; sixty-three? *And* I got sixty-three—who'll make it sixty-four? Sixty-three sixty-four? Sixty-three, sixty-four? *And* I got sixty-four—"

The bidding on Charlie was spirited. He was a fine veal calf.

Gerard was so intent on the movements of the black-and-white calf in the ring that he wasn't aware of a sudden murmur of excitement that began to grow outside the ring. He hardly noticed when the auctioneer pounded with his gavel and asked for a little quiet so the bidding could continue.

And then suddenly a man vaulted over the fence into the ring and, slapping Charlie out of his way,

climbed up beside the auctioneer. He raised his hands for silence. "Listen, folks! Listen to me a minute!"

Gerard saw it was Hal Watson. In the floodlights Watson looked deathly pale and there was a kind of feverish light in his eyes.

"While this sale has been going on," Watson said to the crowd, "Dave Greer was murdered—stabbed in the back—in one of the pens at the rear of the building."

Voices rose in a low hum of excitement.

"The troopers have arrested Paul Greer for the murder." Watson had to plead for silence after that. "Please, listen! A small boy—the Richards boy—saw the murder. He's missing. And Paul Greer has just escaped from the troopers. He's somewhere around here. He may have harmed the boy. We've got to find him. If we give him time to get away we may never catch up with him!"

Feet scuffled over Gerard's head. People started to climb down from the seats.

"Wait! Listen to me!" Watson shouted. "There's one other thing you should know: Dave Greer was killed because he knew who's been stealing the cattle in these parts. He found out it was his own son!"

That did it. The crowd stormed down out of the seats. Gerard heard himself trying to call out to Mr. Watson. It wasn't Paul Greer! Paul Greer wasn't the man in the

alley. It was Joe—Joe Lucas. Gerard knew that because Charlie had told him.

But nobody could hear Gerard. Everything was forgotten except a manhunt for Paul Greer, who hadn't done anything. Even Charlie was forgotten, trotting in a frightened way around the ring. The place emptied as though it was on fire.

Gerard found himself deserted except for Charlie. He wriggled between the seats and out into the ring. For a moment Charlie didn't seem to recognize him, but when Gerard spoke to him softly he stood still and let Gerard come up to him. Gerard put his arm around Charlie's neck, and stood there, hanging onto him tightly.

"Gerard!"

The boy turned. Standing just outside the ring was Joe Lucas.

"Gerard! Where the heck have you been?" Joe asked, and started toward the ring.

It was made to order for Joe. There was no one in sight. Gerard could hear the excited voices outside on the grounds. No one would come back here. They knew Paul Greer wasn't in the sales ring.

Gerard let go of Charlie and started to move slowly, half backing, toward the scale pen.

"Gerard! Wait a minute!" Joe said sharply. He began to move faster. His hands were on the top rail of the ring fence and Gerard knew he would vault over it and

come after him. Gerard turned and ran through the scale pen into the labyrinth behind it.

"Gerard!" Joe's voice was harsh and angry now.

The pens and alleys behind the sales ring were only dimly lit. Gerard had no idea what led where, but to get out of the building seemed his one chance of safety. He heard Joe's heavy boots come clattering through the scale pen. He was only a matter of yards behind.

"Gerard! Wait a minute!"

Gerard's heart pounded painfully against his ribs. He started down one alley and saw, at a last merciful second, that it ran into a dead end. He cut the other way, slipped on some wet shavings, and fell flat on his face.

"Gerard!"

Gerard scrambled up. He was crying now, unashamedly. But he ran, with all the waning strength in his legs. At the end of a long alley he saw an open door and, beyond it, darkness. If he could just make it! Joe's footsteps were closer, running hard. It seemed to Gerard he could almost hear the sound of Joe's heavy breathing.

He got to the door, with Joe, swearing angrily now, only ten or fifteen yards behind him. Gerard dived out the door onto a muddy patch of earth. To the right was the brightly lighted yard, swarming with excited people. To the left was darkness behind the buildings.

Gerard didn't have time to think. Darkness seemed safer, somehow, than people. Gerard cut to his left, tottering a little, because he couldn't breathe very well any more.

He heard a violent thud, and Joe's profanity reached a hair-curling peak. Joe had fallen when he hit the wet patch of mud.

Gerard rounded the building. He couldn't see anything. It was pitch-black. Almost at once he stumbled over some trash. The buildings were set in the shelter of a high embankment. Gerard tried to climb it, but loose gravel and earth gave way under his feet and he slid back down on his hands and knees.

"Gerard!"

Joe had not lost him. Joe was rounding the building, heading toward him in the darkness. A sob choked up out of Gerard's throat. He turned toward the building and saw an oblong outline of light surrounding what might be a loose-fitting door. It was set in a little alcove and Gerard made for it. He knew, somehow, that he couldn't go any farther. He crouched there in the darkness, praying that Joe wouldn't see him and would go on past him.

A strong gust of wind swept down the space behind the building. Behind him Gerard heard the squeak of rusty hinges. The wind, he thought, had moved the ill-fitting door. Worst of all, as the door came open, light from inside

cast a dim glow over his hiding place. Then, just as suddenly, the door closed again.

"Gerard!" Joe's pounding boots were almost upon him.

And then the unbelievable happened. An arm went round Gerard from behind, pinioning him, and a calloused hand was clapped over his mouth. A hoarse voice whispered in his ear, a voice he would never forget. But not Joe's! *Not Joe's!* Joe was still a few yards away, calling to him.

"Now we'll really find out what you did see, kid," the voice whispered.

Gerard tried to call to Joe from behind the calloused hand; Joe, who had seemed so dangerous and who now seemed the only hope left him. The hand dropped from his mouth, but he could make no sound, because the arm had gone around his throat, pulling his head back, choking the breath out of him. His eyes felt like hard marbles, about to pop out of his head.

Lon Sanders sat at one of the desks in the office, hunched over a thick notebook filled with penciled notations. Beside the book on the desk was a stack of worn newspaper clippings. He seemed completely absorbed, oblivious of the excited shouts outside in the yard and of Esther Mulloy, who stood beside him, pounding frantically at him with her fists.

"You can't just sit here and let it

happen, Lon! They'll kill him if they find him!"

"Go away, honey," Lon said softly. He wet the point of a pencil with his tongue and made a note on a piece of blank paper.

"Lon! Listen to them! You're the only one who has any chance of stopping them!"

"Go away, Esther!" The pale blue eyes turned on her and there was a cold fury in them.

Esther, shocked by the violence of it, stepped away and stood staring at him, bewildered. Then she turned and ran out of the office and into the yard.

A crowd turned loose in a frightening thing. Esther paused on the elevation of the Number One dock and looked out over the flood-lit yard. Groups of men, most of them crudely armed with sticks, pieces of old iron, even lengths of chain, were roistering from truck to truck, searching. Many of the trucks had already been loaded with animals for the return journey. Over the deep-throated sound of human excitement came the whinnying of horses, the mooing of cattle, the shrill barking of dogs that ran from group to group, caught up in the hysteria.

Beyond the perimeter of the light thrown by the floods, torches winked in the underbrush.

Someone spoke at Esther's elbow: "They'll get him. He hasn't got a chance."

It was Mac Sperry. "They've got

road-blocks all round. Finney's sure he never had a chance to take off in a car, but they aren't running risks."

"Mac, isn't there some way this can be stopped?" Esther pleaded. "He didn't do it, you know. He's innocent."

"Why did he run, then?" Mac asked.

"Because he thought Gerard Richards was in danger and no one would listen to him!"

"You're a fine girl, Esther," Mac said. "Too bad you got tangled up with that no-good killer."

"He didn't kill anyone, Mac!"

Mac turned up his coat collar around his neck. The night was damp and chilly. "Sorry, Esther. Facts are facts." He left her to join one of the groups of searchers.

There was only one note of hope, as far as Esther was concerned. Every minute that passed meant that Paul had somehow found himself a hiding place. He couldn't keep dodging three or four hundred men for long. The fact that they hadn't caught up with him meant there was a chance he had got away. It wouldn't mean much in the long run, but right now the hysteria of the crowd was far more dangerous to Paul than incriminating evidence.

Off to the right there were shouts of warning. Someone had lowered the tailboard of a truck, and a heavy work horse, rearing and plunging, had torn loose from his

tie rope, jumped down off the end of the truck, and was running wild, plunging and kicking through the crowd. Men shouted and waved at the charging horse to turn him out of their paths. Esther saw an old man go down as the horse veered his course and ran straight over him. People gathered round. Another horse had broken loose from the same truck and was rearing and striking out with his front feet at a man who'd caught his broken halter.

For a matter of minutes everyone in the center of the yard concentrated on catching and subduing the two horses. It was during those moments that Esther saw Hal Watson running toward her.

"Esther, go back into the office and stay there!" he shouted at her. His face was white and streaked with sweat. "It isn't going to be pretty when they find him."

"You started this!" she accused. "You've got to stop it."

"Esther! The man killed his own father! He stole my cattle! Right now he may be doing away with that Richards kid!"

"That's nonsense, and you know it."

"Well, I warned you," Watson said. He turned and trotted back across the yard. The two escaped horses were under control and were being led into one of the pens inside the building. The search for Paul Greer began again, under a new head of steam.

Gerard opened his eyes in pitch-blackness. He had no idea where he was. Something was bound tightly over his mouth. He was lying on his back, and his arms, tied behind him, were bloodless and aching almost beyond endurance. He tried to move his feet. They were tied to something that felt like a metal bar. He tried to shift his position, and there was the creaking sound of protesting springs. He realized he was lying on some kind of broken-down bed. At the same moment that the springs squeaked, someone whispered in the darkness.

"Who's there?"

Gerard could only moan behind the gag. Someone stumbled against a piece of furniture, and a moment later hands touched Gerard, moved quickly over him as if trying to identify him by the feel. They moved up to the gag and pulled it down off his mouth. At the same moment a hand went over his mouth.

"Gerard?"

Gerard nodded his head violently.

"It's Paul," the voice whispered. Then the hand came away and Gerard was free to speak.

"Paul," Gerard whispered. "I didn't see you. I swear it."

"Of course you didn't," Paul said. "I wasn't there." His fingers were working on the ropes that bound Gerard's feet. "Who brought you here? Who did this to you?"

"I don't know. Honest, Paul. All along I thought it was Joe. I was hiding from him, and then he saw me and I ran away because I thought it was him. Then someone else grabbed me from behind."

Paul had the foot ropes untied. "Roll over on your stomach, and I'll get those hands untied."

"Are they—are they still after you, Paul?"

"Listen to them!" Paul said. They could hear the voices, still shouting, still excited.

"Where are we?" Gerard asked.

"It's a room at the back of the barns," Paul said. "Lon's truck drivers use it when they get in with a load too late to go home. There are a couple of makeshift beds in here."

Gerard was free, and Paul rubbed his arms to get the circulation started. It was funny, because it was so dark Gerard couldn't even see an outline of Paul, who was right beside him on the bed.

"What happened back there, Gerard, when Dad was killed?" Paul asked.

Gerard told him. How he'd heard the screaming, and how he'd suddenly been grabbed from behind and then knocked out. He told how the same thing had happened again.

"Gee, my throat's awful sore where he choked me," Gerard said.

Paul was silent for a moment, his hand resting reassuringly on

Gerard's knee. "I ought to turn you loose and have you go straight to Lon Sanders or Finney and let them know you're safe," he said.

"Please, Paul, I don't want to go away from you," Gerard said. "If you'd come with me—"

Paul's laugh was short. "All I've got to do is show my face to that mob!"

"Why doesn't anyone look for you here?" Gerard asked.

"Because I ran out of the buildings. They probably think I headed for the woods."

"Were you here when *he* brought me in?" Gerard asked.

"Lord, no, Gerard! I wish I had been, because then we'd know. I doubled back in the building and was ducking around there till I found this place, a couple of minutes ago. I didn't know you were here till I heard you move." Paul brought his hand down on Gerard's knee. "Listen! He's going to come back, sooner or later, to make sure you're still tied up. Gerard?"

"Yes, Paul."

"Have you got what it takes to stay here with me? To wait for him?"

"I g-guess so, Paul—if you say so."

"I shouldn't let you. But—"

"Paul! Listen!" Gerard whispered.

They both sat still, scarcely breathing. Slow, heavy footsteps were coming along the corridor outside.

"Quick!" Paul whispered. "Stretch out on the bed with your hands under you agin."

"What are you going to do, Paul?"

"I'll be by the door. When he comes in to take a look at you I'll take him. Hurry!"

Gerard lay down with his hands under him. He still couldn't see anything.

"Just lie perfectly still," Paul whispered. Then Gerard heard him move toward the door.

A moment later the door slowly opened. There was hardly any light behind it, but there was just enough for Gerard to see who it was before the beam from a lighted torch suddenly blinded him. The huge figure of Lon Sanders filled the doorway.

The next moment the room was flooded with light and the door slammed shut behind Lon. Paul had spotted the light switch. At the same moment that he turned it on, he lunged at the auctioneer. His objective had been the iron-pointed cane Lon carried in his right hand. Paul was wiry and strong, but the big man stood like a colossus, his feet braced. Then he reached out with his left hand and pushed. It didn't seem to involve much effort, but Paul went hurtling back against the wall.

"So it *was* you!" Paul said, panting for breath.

"Don't be a fool," Lon said. "Is the kid all right?"

"Dad suspected you, Lon," Paul said, "When there was never any trace of out-of-town trucks. Who had trucks on the roads carrying livestock every day and night of the week in half a dozen states? Who would stop one of your trucks loaded with cattle? Everyone knew you. Honest Lon Sanders!"

"I tell you, don't be a fool," Lon said.

Paul seemed to be gathering himself together for another futile attack on the huge man at the door. The talk was calculated to let him choose his own moment.

"Who had an iron-pointed cane? You and I, Lon. You used yours, and when it broke, you picked mine up. You planted the broken piece in my truck. Then you let that mob loose on me. *You* could have stopped it, but you didn't. You let them get well started, and then you came here to finish off the kid. He saw you, didn't he, Lon? At least, you thought he did."

"Will you stop being an idiot?" Lon said. "I was on the stand all afternoon—"

"You often take a break—not more than a minute or two, but time enough. You could have had a confederate to warn you."

The two men stared at each other, motionless. Then Lon spoke again in his low, even voice:

"You're wrong, Paul. Your old man put me on the track. I said it had to be out-of-town trucks, and something about the way he an-

swered me stuck in my head. I got thinking—just the way he did. My trucks, that pick up and deliver for this auction, could go anywhere, and nobody would question them. We're all over the county, all over five or six states, every day and night of the week. We know where the cattle are. We know the farms and the pasture lots just like the average man knows his own back yard. We could pick up cattle out of a pasture, drive 'em out of the county somewhere, transfer 'em to another truck, and go on about our legitimate business. If we were stopped by a road-block no one would suspect us. It could be worked, if you could reroute your trucks at the last minute to avoid trouble. And we *do* that! Our drivers call in every few hours to see if we want to reroute 'em in relation to new orders."

"So you're admitting it?" Paul said.

"I think it was my trucks," Lon said. "I've been checking our truck orders against the stealings. Each time one of our trucks was rerouted, it was into an area where a theft took place."

"You think you're going to get rid of me and the kid so we can't tell this?" Paul asked grimly.

"You know," Lon said. "I'm tempted to tell Esther Mulloy she's tied up to a muttonhead! I—" He stopped abruptly, his head turned to one side. "Now keep still, or I may polish you off."

Deliberately he reached out and turned off the light switch, plunging the place into darkness. Outside, hurried footsteps approached the door. The door opened quickly and closed again. There was an agonized cry of pain. . . . The light switched on, and Lon stood there, holding Mac Sperry, the cashier, by the wrist. Mac was groveling.

"Stop, Lon! You're breaking my arm! What's the matter with you?"

Lon did not release his grip. "I came back here looking for you and the kid, Mac. I finally figured it." He turned to Paul: "You might slap him over a little. This kind of rat may just as likely be carrying a gun."

"Don't let him near me!" Mac cried. "He's a killer!"

"Hogwash," Lon said.

Paul went over Mac. In his hip pocket was a small revolver.

Lon went on. "I been going over the books, Mac. I got the whole thing figured out. Now we'll do a little talkin' and find out who the big shots are who were paying you off."

"I don't know what you're talking about. Honest, Lon."

"Okay, let's go," Lon said. "I'll tell my side of the story to that crowd out there and let them judge."

"No!"

Gerard had slid down off the bed and gone over to stand beside Paul. "All the time I thought it was Joe,"

he said. "Because Charlie told me."

"You did right to run from Joe, son," Lon said. "Mac here was the brains, but it was Joe's truck that Mac always rerouted to the key spots."

Paul's jaw muscles rippled. "Which one was it, Lon? Tell me—which one?"

"I got the answer to that," Lon said. "I checked on Joe. When Dave was killed he was helping the handlers in the Number One dock."

"But Charlie!" Gerard said. "I heard him, and I knew it had to be someone Charlie knew—and there was only Joe."

"I'll tell you something about animals, Mr. Richards," Lon said. "An animal that's hand-raised, like your Charlie, will holler at any human bein' for help when he's in trouble. He gets to trust 'em. Maybe you and Joe and your Ma was the only ones he ever hollered at before, but that's because no one else was ever around him. Right? But down here he'd have hollered at anyone. You was asleep, Mr. Richards, and Charlie was in trouble. When he saw Dave Greer and Mac in the alley, he left you and went over to them. Like I said, he trusted people. There was never a calf yet could name a man—or tell time!"

Lon looked down at the groveling Mac Sperry. "How was it, Mac? We'll get it out of you if we have to pull it out!"

On his knees, Mac rocked back

and forth with the physical pain of his fear.

"It was him," he said, nodding toward Paul. "All this play-actin' of his—hanging around saloons, talking about how he wanted to make a fast buck. It was an act that him and the old man figured out. Paul was tryin' to get in with the racket by talkin' out of turn."

Lon glanced at Paul, who nodded slowly.

"He and Dave were talkin' in the Number Four dock," Mac said. "I heard 'em when I went out to load the poultry crates. They were talkin' about your trucks, Lon. I figured the minute they started getting hot on that trail the whole thing would blow up. I ran into Hal Watson and I took him back with me. I wanted a witness. Dave and Paul were still talkin', but they must have spotted me, because they started this fake argument. I was sure, then, they suspected me."

"We didn't, as a matter of fact," Paul said. "We thought it was you, Lon. But we figured Mac was loyal to you, and we thought if he overheard us he might go to you."

"It wouldn't have mattered, once you sprang it," Mac said. "I knew I had to act fast. I figured if I got rid of the old man and framed you for his killing, nobody would believe you. So I ditched Hal, I went back to the Number Four dock. I figured on following Dave and knocking him out with a bailing iron or something. But you helped

me, Paul. You'd left your cane hanging over the top of the dock rail. I saw old Dave walking down the alley to the veal-calf pen."

Mac moistened his lips. "I—I took the cane and followed him. I crept up behind him and drove the cane into him. He—he screamed, something awful. I thought sure someone would come running. He staggered against the gate to the pen where that crazy cow was. I unlatched it and shoved him in."

"Then I saw this kid climbing over the fence from the calf pen. I didn't know if he'd seen me or not. I ducked down behind some baled hay, and when he walked past I grabbed him. The way he reacted I figured he hadn't seen anything. So I flattened him and got out of there before he could see who I was." Mac drew a gasping breath. "Soon as I could, I told Joe. The kid had already given him the slip and we kept hunting for him. 'Course I had to keep showing up now and then, or you'd have got suspicious. Then Joe spotted the kid. He signaled me. The kid ran, and Joe followed him. I went to cover the back way in case he circled round, and he walked right into my arms. I brought him here."

"What I can't figure," Lon said slowly, "is why you didn't finish him off if you thought he knew. That mob would have pinned it on Paul."

"I heard someone coming," Mac said. "So I tied him up and beat it,

figuring I'd have to come back."

"It must have been me you heard," Paul said.

"And you, son," Lon said to Paul. "You'd have saved a lot if you'd talked out about yourself."

"I know," Paul said. "But things happened so fast. I could see someone was planning to frame me. I thought if I kept my mouth shut I might catch him at the next move. Then when you found the planted cane in my truck, the boy was missing! It might have taken me hours to convince you. I couldn't risk what might happen to Gerard if he wasn't found fast."

Lon looked at Mac. "Twenty years you been working for me, Mac. Why? Why?"

Mac's voice rose: "Years and years I been counting your money, Lon—thousands and thousands of dollars every day. I wanted some for myself. They were paying me well, the guys behind this racket. They—"

"Let's get out of here," Lon said. "I feel kind of sick." He yanked

Mac to his feet. Then he turned to Paul. "You two better stay here till I get that mob quieted and everything explained. I'll send Esther to you."

"I'm sorry, Lon," Paul said. "I'm sorry I had it wrong."

"Forget it, son. I am to blame in a way, letting it go on right under my big nose." He moved, and then stopped again. "And by the way, Mr. Richards, the money for that calf of yours is waiting for you in the cashier's office. Ninety-two dollars. Your Ma should be right proud of you."

"T-thank you, sir," Gerard said, his lips quivering.

Lon's pale eyes twinkled. "And when Paul and Esther are ready to take you home, Mr. Richards, you'll find that calf of yours in the back of Paul's truck." Lon's huge stomach jiggled in silent laughter. "A talking calf—even if it ain't so—ought to sort of be kept around as a curiosity, is the way I figure it."

Then Lon walked out, dragging Dave Greer's murderer behind him.

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